





# LEGEND OF THE SUPREME SOLDIER

BOOK 01

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EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

# **Legend of the Supreme Soldier**

## **(师士传说)**

**by**

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**(方想)**

# Synopsis

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Ye Chong was a denizen of Trash Planet-12. On one fateful day, he discovered a treasure that would forever alter his destiny from a pile of junk – Mu Shang, an unknown machine with artificial intelligence and a lost memory. Together, they venture into the vast galaxy as the isolated “caveman” that was Ye Chong began absorbing all sorts of knowledge and meeting people from all walks of life. He gradually discovers more and more about his own mysterious past as well as his partner’s. Read to find out more!

# Acknowledgement

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# Chapter 1: Treasure and Trash

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Trash Planet-12 was one of many trash planets in the Fal star system.

Its eponymous function was for trash disposal. As science continued to advance into the space age, humanity's lifestyles underwent a paradigm shift. Life became comfortable, tranquil, and the initial urgent concerns about resources and ecological balance had diminished due to advancement of humankind beyond the skies. As more new planets were discovered and humanity's space technology matured, society developed more hectic and humanistic lifestyles, and trash. The costs of recycling were too high, but leaving trash around would have negative impacts on society's living environment, not to mention the inevitable discontentment that would follow. The solution adopted by the nations was to dispose of their waste on these so-called "trash planets". Trash planets were either naturally lacking or artificially deprived of resources and not to mention uninhabited, which made them ideal landfills for trash.

Under grey skies, a variety of trash formed a mountainous landscape – the land is silent, the air dead. Cool metals gleamed with unique metallic coldness, but dust had masked their original shine, only an occasional spot untouched by rust would remind one of their former glory.

On this apparently lifeless trash planet, one would have thought no human

could exist, considering the harsh environment, devoid of food and water, lacked the necessities for survival. There was only one thing here – trash!

Ye Chong raised his head to study the antiquated analogue clock, found three years ago at the foot of a particular mountain of trash, ten kilometers away. Its touch-based motion sensor was damaged

then, which took Ye Chong a week of fixing to function again. The clock now replaced its predecessor, an even more outdated pendulum clock.

It was now 3:42 FT (Fal Time), and Ye Chong knew that in another 13 minutes, the weather outside would reach the day's most suitable temperature for heading outdoors, and this decent climate would end at 6:17 FT. At other hours, the weather outside would either be as scorching as an oven or as cold as the peak of winter.

According to routine, there should be a scheduled trash disposal last night. Ye Chong considered for a trip outside today, to see if he can score some new goods. Not that he was lacking in food, that engulfer he caught last time still had a great half of it left, enough for another 3 days. Besides, there was still a good stock of organic liquid food left, but they tasted far worse than fresh meat,; more like wax, which had been left alone for quite a while.

It was 3:55 FT, and Ye Chong sprinted out of his home in a blink of an eye. Time was precious to Ye Chong. The current location where the automated trash disposal ship discharged of its cargo was half an hour's journey away from his hideout, which implied that Ye Chong's hour-long trip to his destination left him with only less than half an hour's time to forage.

Ye Chong scampered through the labyrinth of trash like an agile creature with incredible swiftness. He was very familiar with the ins and outs of the local landscape, and Ye Chong believed he could still find his way through even with his eyes closed.

The headwind whistled past his ears, and Ye Chong enjoyed the satisfaction that came with his speed. But he was always alert of his surroundings, for survival on a trash planet would mean violent encounters with all sorts of mutated life forms.

Trash planets were unsuited for human habitation, but for mutated life forms, they were no doubt, heaven. The hostile

environment was nothing to the highly adaptable mutants. Local resources were bountiful—trash, for the rat-like engulfer, was food, and so on this very planet, their numbers grew exponentially.

This planet was also unlike its cousins that were untouched by humanity, popular spots for mech pilots to tempt their fate. No mech pilot would want to lay a foot on a forbidding place like this. Without the mechs hunting them down, the mutants flourished in the absence of their greatest enemy.

Ye Chong's home was in the middle of a mountain of trash, the route leading to it was a crack not more than four meters wide. Jutting metal beams on the exterior made for a dangerous looking façade for the route's entrance.

Ye Chong did not slow down, his stride long and powerful – one would have mistaken his movements as that of a primate, the agility astonishing. But there were no spectators on this trash planet, and this amazing moment belonged to him and him alone.

Ye Chong pushed hard with his legs and leapt through the air, and as he reached the peak of the jump, he grabbed onto a horizontal titanium beam that was suspended midair. He then swung around it and did a few flips before landing steadily on the trash mountain.

Ye Chong came to a halt and used his right index finger to caress the nondescript jet-black metallic ring on his left ring finger while calling out softly, "Winnie!".

A greyish-green mech appeared before Ye Chong, and he mumbled out of habit, "If only I can find a neural receiver this time, voice command sucks." He slipped easily into the pilot's seat.

Winnie's built was like the average mech, around ten meters tall, with a thickset bulky body and equally thickset limbs, all amounting to the looks of a metallic lump, and the undeniably bald head was a comical touch. By virtue of age, the mech's exterior appeared dull, but the rounded shoulders and knee joints



embedded irregularly with barbed hooks added points for a merciless impression. Winnie's body was scattered with wounds of all kinds, like scratches and bite marks, and the sight was ghastly. But Winnie was obviously well-cared-for, boasting a spotless exterior; all proof how much Ye Chong cherished the machine.

If not for Winnie, Ye Chong may not have lived till today – at least as far as Ye Chong believed, he could not have survived through more than two engulfers without a mech, and the rodents out here were never found with less than five in a group. On this trash planet, being weak was synonymous to a quick death, the law of natural selection fully adopted by the ways of the local inhabitants.

There was one person whose story reveals a close relation between a man and a mech, and that was Ye Chong's foster father. Ye Chong only knew him as Gao Shi Chang, the rest of his background remained a mystery. According to his foster father, he was initially the only man on the trash planet, until one day he found a boy, with the words "Ye Chong" written on his body. As to how his foster father arrived on this trash planet, and his former occupation, the man was ever so tight lipped about them.

This mech was the result of his foster father's foraging. It was originally a mech made for public use, which, after his foster father's interminable modifications, was nearly unrecognizable for what it once was. According to him, in the outside world, almost everyone owned a mech, but since most of them were recycled upon disposal, it was hard to find one on trash planets without a good deal of luck. Under his foster father's influence, Ye Chong developed great interest in mechs, and his foster father was generous in sharing his knowledge; the duo frequently engaged in exciting discussions around the very much aged mech processor at home. The mech was named Winnie which, according to his foster father, was a classic brand of engines for outdated mechs.

Unlike his foster father's preference for modifications, Ye Chong

had an almost innate instinct and sensitivity in maneuvering the mech just as it is. As such, Winnie was always piloted by him. His foster father once mentioned that Ye Chong would make for a fine pilot one day.

After a close encounter with five engulfers that led to an intense battle and a successful escape, Ye Chong began to train himself conscientiously for the actual combat. After his first taste of fresh rat meat, he could never take interest in the organic liquid food churned out from the food producer machine.

Ceaseless ordeals in actual combat meant Ye Chong was no longer his old, innocent self, with the exception of a few terrifying and ferocious creatures that Ye Chong would never dare approach. All other life forms were no longer a threat to Ye Chong. but, if Ye Chong was careless, these creatures could still be potentially fatal.

Unfortunately, Winnie was too old, such that even after all those adjustments, the lack of good parts and tools meant that Winnie was already as good as it would ever be. The fatal flaw would be Winnie's brain, which was too outdated.

His foster father might have been an expert in the mechanics, but he was absolutely clueless about mech processors.

The man once said, for any mech, if the engine is its heart, then the processor is its soul.

Ye Chong felt restricted in many ways, piloting the current mech.

Winnie's only slightly redeeming feature was its pair of bionic eyes. When Ye Chong brought them to his foster father's attention, even he had no idea what model it was, with only a rough idea that it could be a new model from recent years. After all, he had wandered on the trash planet for decades, whatever advances beyond the planet, he could not obscure.

It was thanks to this pair of modern bionic eyes, that Ye Chong

escaped from danger time and again.

Although Winnie was old, until such time where a newer mech could be found, Winnie was Ye Chong's only choice.

Ye Chong carefully upped the speed for Winnie until 80% of its maximum speed, as this allowed for a faster travel with room for emergency adjustments.

The travel was smooth, and Ye Chong arrived at his destination without obstructions. Anywhere he laid eyes on was filled with trash, but there were distinct areas where the trash were more recent additions, and these were Ye Chong's goals for the day.

"Scanning commenced!" Winnie's voice was unrushed, with a slowness akin to an aging senior, Ye Chong thought helplessly, but he scanned his surroundings warily. For once, Winnie carried out a full scan with its eyes but will cease all other functions thus, Ye Chong will have to be fully alert for threats.

Ye Chong examined some corners where mutated lifeforms could possibly emerge from, all the while muttering, "Come on old buddy, you got to do some good today, I haven't had any new stuff in a while! Come on now... Come on..." Eventually, Ye Chong began humming a little tune. All alone on this trash planet, if he went on for some time without uttering a word, Ye Chong was not sure if he ever could again and so, despite the lack of another person to interact with, talking to himself had slowly become routine.

Ye Chong maintained a casual façade, but his slightly tense posture spoke of his state of high vigilance.

"Scanning completed!" The announcement was like music to his ears. Ye Chong exhaled deeply in relief.

"Switch to High Alert Mode!" Ye Chong gave Winnie the order, and immediately scrutinized the scan results relayed from the processor; a few red patches on the scanned images looking

particularly conspicuous. Ye Chong could not contain his excitement – it seemed that the forage this time would be fruitful.

Scavenging in the trash heaps. Ye Chong spat out grains of sand that made their way into his mouth from the mech's crevices.

“Damn it! Not one of them is useful, by the Heavens, surely I could not be so unlucky!” Ye Chong wailed, his initial excitement gone without a trace. He had searched through many spots,; all ending up with useless junk, and now only the last spot remained, with the smallest object on the list. Based on the size, Ye Chong could not figure out what it could possibly be used for, but better a mistake than a missed opportunity as he dived headlong into the mountainous heap of trash.

Ye Chong half laid on a chair, munching on freshly roasted engulfer's meat, as he toyed with today's only object of value.

It seemed to be a metallic hanging ornament with a dull metallic shine, and only the size of three fingernails. It was roundish with a perimeter lined with a curved blade, and its surface densely covered with queer patterns that seemed indistinguishable, but possibly based on some unknown underlying principles. Sadly, a chipped corner and some cracks along the blade told the story of a damaged, secondary article.

Ye Chong murmured, “What is this? What a strange material!”

His thumb gently caressed the edge of the blade, and a thin cut appeared which Ye Chong felt nothing from, until the sight of crimson brought on a flicker of pain.

“Very sharp indeed!” Ye Chong was slightly surprised. “Surely this gimmick is not a hidden weapon?!” Ye Chong watched as a drop of blood hanged off the edge of the blade, from the cut earlier.

Lo and behold, a mysterious phenomenon occurred!

Beyond the bounds of possibility, the blade unexpectedly absorbed the blood, much like a sponge. A blood-absorbing metal?

Ye Chong jumped back in shock. There was no mistake, he touched it, and the blade was undeniably metal! Ye Chong bet that the scene he just witnessed was no illusion.

The eeriness showed no signs of stopping.

The blood-fed ornament emitted a light buzzing sound, the curved blade retracted into the body of the ornament, and the cryptic patterns on its surface began to move. The ornament behaved as though a machine grinding in operations, and Ye Chong's blood was the catalyst.

Ye Chong was completely dumbfounded!

A voice resonated without warning in Ye Chong's mind, "Di-proton examination completed, brainwave matched, brainwave locked!"

Ye Chong frantically exclaimed, "Who's there! Come out!" His vision sharpened as he scanned his surroundings, his hand quietly reaching for the dagger holstered on his leg.

"Are you sure?" The same voice sounded uncertain.

## Chapter 2: Man and Machine

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“Are you sure?” The same voice sounded uncertain.

“Nonsense! Just show yourself and we’ll see!” Ye Chong’s expression betrayed mild impatience, but the intensity of his gaze were a contrast to his apparent emotions. Ye Chong arched his body slightly, like a bow ready to fire, prepared to deliver a fatal blow.

“Then I’m coming out!” The voice maintained its level tone.

Immediately, the room dimmed, and Ye Chong did not manage a reaction before hearing a deafening rumble as a huge wave of trash engulfed him whole.

The trash planet fell silent again.

After a long stillness, in a trash heap near a Pulsed Signal Relay Station, a hand suddenly emerged from the heap, and a filthy man climbed his way out of the trash heap.

Cough... cough...

“Bad things come in threes, huh...” Ye Chong cursed as he shook the little rocks and sand grains out of his clothing. Up to this point, Ye Chong could not understand what had happened.

Could it be that, this was the legendary mode of self-destruction?

He looked on at the sorry sight of the area, the entrance to his home no longer there – everywhere was just trash and more trash. Ye Chong shuddered at the aftermath– how long would it take to carve out another entrance?

Ye Chong cursed murderously under his breath, “Once I find you, you little scum, I will make you pay!” The fury in him burned like a lasting wildfire.

As Ye Chong stared at the perpetrator of this whole incident, he found himself speechless.

The route-digging took three whole days, and the thought of the long and arduous process fueled Ye Chong's anger towards the perpetrator to new unprecedented heights.

But when Ye Chong tried to deal with the perpetrator, the fire would not catch.

Its metallic shell, aesthetic and powerful, the alternating blue-and-white laser coating pristine, the mech's surface completely spotless despite being amongst filthy and disgusting trash. When Ye Chong found it, it was just quietly standing there, firmly, as though nothing in existence could ever perturb it.

Ye Chong knew at first glance that he had found real treasure!

If the first glance at the mech gave him joy, a second glance made Ye Chong understand profoundly the meaning of pain within joy.

A huge scar extended from its left shoulder to its waist, even exposing part of its engine to the air, and the entire left arm was missing. It was as though a one-of-a-kind exquisite painting of perfection was forcefully ripped in half.

This was a human-shaped mech, with a height of around twelve meters, its body painted with alternating blues and whites, with an elongated overall design, a world's difference from Winnie's thickset bulkiness. The mech's body radiated a faint, mysterious metallic luster, the protective armor panels on the chest were like the abs of well-development muscles, but not clumsily so. The icy cold profile had edges that looked as though they cut, and hosted an enigmatic pair of blue bionic eyes that blinked rhythmically, emanating a supernatural charm.

Ye Chong was stunned, as he stared at the dilapidated mech that destroyed his home. For a moment, Ye Chong was thoroughly captivated by this damaged but unique mech, as though the mech had bewitched his entire being with magic.

"Beep self-assessment completed, engine functions at 86%, left

limb functions at 0%, cabin functions at 97%, other parts are fully functional!”

The gender-neutral voice interrupted Ye Chong out of his fantasies.

Ye Chong blurted, “Waah, this is the real deal, a self-assessing mech!” If one looked closely, one could see Ye Chong’s mouth gaping wide enough to fit an engulfer’s thigh and even drooling.

The damaged mech suddenly spoke, “Hello!”

A mech that greets, Ye Chong thought in a daze, and greeted back instinctively, “Hello!”

The mech continued, “My name is Mu Shang, you can call me Mu!”

Ye Chong was still not out of his reverie, “Oh, I’m Ye Chong, you can call me Ye!”

Abruptly, Ye Chong came back to his senses and flinched as though burned on the ass. He pointed at the damaged mech and stammered, “You – you – you – you can talk?”

The damaged mech that was Mu Shang nodded gracefully, “At a certain level, your observation is accurate!”

Ye Chong repeated in disbelief, “A mech that speaks?”

“Um-hum!”

With the addition of Mu Shang, Ye Chong’s home inevitably grew in space to thrice its original size. From Mu Shang, Ye Chong came to realize that the hanging ornament was Mu Shang’s spatial control, but Mu Shang seemed to prefer being outside than in the alternate dimension. Ye Chong was also grateful for the company – for a sixteen-year-old, loneliness was almost unbearable.

Ye Chong sat down heavily, finally finished with his work, and completely exhausted. Mu Shang imitated Ye Chong’s actions, as it swooshed down to a sitting position beside Ye Chong with a loud



thud. Dust erupted into the air, and Ye Chong was caught off guard amidst the chaos as he was sent tumbling to a corner by the strong gust. As he rose, face frozen in anger, what he found was Mu Shang had smashed a large hole in the ground, and the mech was still sitting comfortably in the hole as it looked back with innocent eyes.

Under the lighting, the tiny human and the huge machine sat side by side.

Ye Chong asked curiously, “Mu, what happened to you?”

Mu Shang answered, “Information corrupted, reason is unknown!”

Ye Chong gulped down a mouthful of water and laughed. “Hah, if it must be because you are actually not powerful enough, to be beaten up like that!”

Mu Shang replied, “Information corrupted, reason is unknown!”

Ye Chong’s laughter ended abruptly, and he moped. “Oh come one, can’t you be a little more interesting? Don’t just be like ‘information this’, ‘information that’!”

Mu Shang tilted its head in confusion. “Interesting? What is ‘interesting’?”

Ye Chong scratched his head in frustration, for he was stumped. “Er, er, that question is, hmm, a bit complicated, er, let’s talk about something else, Mu, are you actually male or female?”

... ..

Ye Chong sat in Mu Shang’s cabin, stupefied, as he stared in obvious disbelief, his hand caressing this and that in absolute adoration and admiration. “Mu, you must be one of the best mechs there is, aren’t you?”

Mu replied evenly, “Information archive indicates that the answer is negative. Calculation indicates the probability of

inclusion in the top 500 ranking mechs as 26%, in the 501th to 600th ranking range as 63%, beyond the 600th ranking as 11%.”

Ye Chong gasped in astonishment. “500 mechs? Are there so many more great mechs? But, back to your point, being in the top 500 is not too shabby! In any case, you’re definitely better than Winnie!”

Naturally, Ye Chong did not fully understand the implications of Mu Shang ranking within the top 500, even in its current state of dilapidation. Ye Chong had always dreamed of owning a mech more advanced than Winnie one day, and then he would march forth and challenge the trash planet’s most ferocious mutants in battle. What would the giant iron lizard’s meat taste like? Ye Chong licked his lips without realizing it. Hah, the time will come when I crown myself as King of this trash planet!

Mu Shang heartlessly cut short his fantasy. “Winnie’s strength cannot be calculated!”

Ye Shang immediately pulled a face, “I know that!” “Mu, can I be your pilot?” he asked with anticipation.

“Denied!”

Cries Oh well, it looks like he’ll have to pilot Winnie himself!

Ye Chong was deeply saddened, but he caught on to a puzzling aspect. “Then why do you have a cabin?”

Mu Shang was silent for a few second before responding. “Information is corrupted, query is impossible!”

“Then do you remember who made you?” Ye Chong asked, interested.

“Information is corrupted, query is impossible!”

The ever so lonely Ye Chong was deeply absorbed in the conversation, and just as he was about to continue with the questions, a sudden alarm buzzed softly, as Mu Shang announced,

“Energy level depleted!” Upon inspection of the energy indication display, the level was a hair’s breadth away from zeroing out.

Since Trash Planet-12 was situated close to a star, it had a nearly unlimited supply of solar energy, or at least Ye Chong never faced problems with energy supply. But when he used up all his backup energy cells on Mu Shang and found that it did not even recover 10% of its full capacity, Ye Chong was confounded!

As Mu Shang connected directly to the solar panels, Ye Chong was speechless, and prayed that the energy cell circulating his house would last until Mu Shang was finished charging that day.

Mu Shang was quiet throughout the charging process, and Ye Chong, bored with the whole process, dozed off.

The next day, as Ye Chong rubbed off the sleepiness of his tired eyes, he found that Mu Shang looked a little different. The machine’s surface looked as if it was coated with an extra layer of shine that added to the mysteriousness of the mech.

Ye Chong gasped, “Mu, you looked beautiful all of a sudden!”

Mu Shang seemed to understand Ye Chong’s meaning of ‘beautiful’, and explained, “This is the photon excitation effect, where an adequate energy supply produces a lifelike shine on metallic surfaces, the basic theory is that ...”

Ye Chong sported his baggy eyelids and couldn’t stop yawning.

Mu Shang seemed to enjoy the lecturing, showing no signs of stopping. “Other theories involved are actually quite simple, they can be classified into the following fields ...”

Ye Chong bowed his head, like a monk in meditation, and one would notice upon close inspection that a line of “moisture” had formed on his lap, forming a big patch of dampness on his trousers.

Mu Shang was not quite finished. “And so, from here one can reach the conclusion that a mech’s strength ...”

A thundering snore cut off Mu Shang's lecture. Mu Shang looked angrily towards the source of the sound, and saw Ye Chong snoring rhythmically through his nose, incessantly, and his shoulders rose and fell with his heavy breathing.

Mu Shang humphed in anger!

## Chapter 3: In Good Company

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In some corner of a trash mountain, two mechs laid in ambush behind some trash, and about a hundred meters away were five engulfers scavenging through the trash for food, occasionally scanning their surroundings for threat. Ye Chong scrutinized the layout of the land and proceeded with a short discussion with Mu Shang.

Ye Chong piloted Winnie carefully, slowly approaching the five engulfers, taking cover behind various debris along the way. They stopped about twenty meters away from the engulfers, and Ye Chong exhaled in relief, as things were going smoothly so far. Ye Chong intended to move, when a sudden gust of wind blew passed him and straight towards the engulfers. Ye Chong cursed inwardly, revved up his mech's speed to maximum and headed straight for the engulfers.

Winnie sprinted towards the engulfers like a blasted cannonball.

But it was too late, when the gust struck, the engulfers caught their scent with their keen sense of smell, and scampered to escape.

Ye Chong kept his cool guiding Winnie and targeted one of the engulfers, for when the creatures escaped into the trash heaps, it would be nearly impossible to get them. Ye Chong ignored the other four engulfers and pursued the remaining rodent securely.

The air whizzed past his ears, and Ye Chong felt as though his blood was rushing, burning even. The world as he perceived it gradually slowed as his brain registered the excitement; his breathing shortened as though every breath took every effort he could muster, and his chest rose and fell in sync with his breathing. Every exhale burned through his nose, as though he was breathing fire.

As he closed in on the engulfer, Ye Chong's hands kept steady,

and began to regulate his breathing.

Abruptly, Winnie ferociously flung a dagger, a resounding clink marked the weapon's landing not three meters ahead of the engulfer. The creature was running at full speed, and upon setting its eyes on the dagger, foresaw its potential bloody demise.

The engulfer made a seemingly impossible twist, as it landed its forelegs on the flat side of the dagger and thrust. It bounced off the dagger with its forward momentum, unharmed from the whole ordeal, executing a most remarkable feat.

The engulfer's eye gleamed as if rejoicing the fact that it would survive the day.

However, before the triumph was over, a sharp breeze headed straight for the engulfer, and even the creature's mediocre hearing could identify the horrors that came with it. The air squalling through the barbs on Winnie's knee joints shrieked dreadfully. If the machine's knees came into contact, the results would be fatal!

Of all the life forms that could survive in the trash planet, none were honorable – even when facing the seemingly hopeless situation at hand, the engulfer would not surrender!

The engulfer arched its back, suspended momentarily in midair and as Winnie's knee came into range, it dynamically bounced off the knee barbs with its forelegs, redirecting its momentum above ambushing Winnie's neck.

Puff

A faint wheeze can be heard as the barbs pierced the engulfer's forelegs and sliced through its vulnerable soft belly; drawing some scars on its hind legs.

On the trash planet, a wound this severe implied certain death but that was not the engulfer's concern – the objective was to land a mighty blow on the enemy before its imminent demise! It mattered not if the blow was no threat to the enemy!

Its fearsome teeth glistened coldly – these teeth that could cut through metal were the engulfer’s last hope to leave an unforgettable mark on its nemesis!

The engulfer’s determination was akin to one’s realization of one’s soul, its act of self-sacrifice radiating with the utmost force of its life! The engulfer truly believed that this attack would be the most intense one throughout its entire existence!

It’s getting closer now, the enemy’s neck grew clearer in view, and the engulfer felt an adrenaline rush! Just one more second, no, half a second! Just half a second was all it needed to execute the most splendid and glorious attack in its life!

Its eyes were burning! Like fire, a blazing euphoria!

Within seconds, the fire within extinguished!

A silent blade that rose from below unhindered slashed the engulfer in half! In a flash, fresh blood and organs showered from above, splashing onto the rust-red soil below.

Ye Chong finally simmered down!

He looked up, and saw Mu Shang observing quietly some distance away. The engulfer was hung on a seven meters long titanium pole. Mu Shang’s strategy was simpler – Ye Chong positioned the mech right where one of the engulfers was escaping towards making the oblivious engulfer defenseless against Mu Shang’s lightning speed and accuracy.

Ye Chong waved at Mu Shang from afar. “Hey!”

He picked up the both parts of his severed engulfer!

Ye Chong boasted to the mech, obviously pleased. “Well? My skills are not bad after all!”

Mu Shang replied flatly, “A complete disappointment!”

Ye Chong did a double take. “What? A complete disappointment? Were you even watching?” To be criticized so mercilessly at

something he took most pride in was not doing wonders to Ye Chong's dignity.

Mu Shang did not ease up. "With the exception of mediocre battle skills, your flying skills, shooting skills and tactical accomplishments were extremely crude. Your experience in real battle is not assessable due to the lack of information!"

"No way!" Ye Chong's eyes widened with a face of disbelief.

Mu Shang shrugged; the image of amusing eccentricity. "Of course, error in assessments stands at 0.3%."

Ye Chong refused to give in. "You must be real jealous to bring me down like that!"

Mu Shang, "The possibility of that is nil!"

"Then it must be because my mech's too old, haha! That must be it. One day I'll give you a try!"

Mu Shang paused, and continued in an odd tone, "There were thirty one escape routes in the trash heaps, how did you know one of the engulfers would pass by where I was positioned?"

"Hehe, awesome right? It was instinct!" Ye Chong announced, pleased.

"Instinct?" Mu Shang's bionic eyes glowed in response.

"Information insufficient, calculation is impossible!"

Ye Chong scoffed at that. "Calculate? If you can calculate it, then it wouldn't be called instinct!"

Mu Shang replied calmly, "It is only an event with a small probability!"

"What? You're saying it was a coincidence? Just luck? I'm telling you ..." Ye Chong exclaimed in frenzy.

.....

Two shadows stretched longer and longer under the setting star.



The spire that was the Pulse Signal Relay Station near Ye Chong's hideout could be seen from afar, like a landmark, showing the way home.

## Chapter 4: Brave New World

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Ye Chong chewed on roasted engulfer's meat as he stared fixated at the schematics for Mu Shang's inner structures before him. It took plenty of convincing for Ye Chong to get Mu Shang to agree to this. The designs were too complex and ingenious, as Ye Chong admired inwardly. Under his foster father's guidance, Ye Chong was definitely qualified to be an expert in mechanics, but the schematics before him did not make much sense, meaning he would have to decipher it bit by bit, but this also dramatically raised his high opinion for the designer.

After half a day, Ye Chong felt his eyes went arid, and so he shifted his vision away from the schematics and peeked at the static Mu Shang by his side, and made an impertinent remark. "Mu, best not waste your efforts, this Pulse Signal Relay Station is not so easy to hack! Why, back then, my foster father tried numerous times and never succeeded."

Mu Shang was inert, as though Ye Chong never spoke.

Ye Chong began his quirky habit of talking to himself again, as he mumbled against the schematics, "Mu, it's not personal, but let's stop trying with this impossible task, you should use your spare time to teach me instead. I mean, I've stared at this tattered schematics for a good part of the day and my head hurts. But the designer behind this must be a genius, tsk tsk. Amazing, amazing..."

Mu Shang suddenly spoke up, "Hacking complete!"

Ye Chong's eyes did not leave the schematics while he replied in reflex, "What? Hacking complete? I say Mu, when did you learn to joke? Hah, not bad, not bad. You're improving! But Mu, a failure is a failure, for something impossible like this, your failure is expected, and so, no one is going to laugh at you..."

Mu Shang ignored Ye Chong and continued, "Fal star system's

weekly news review, Renaissance's new space station, the S.S. Hui Tan will begin accepting new citizens this Monday, the first phase of new citizens will enjoy the following benefits..."

Ye Chong's eyes glazed for a bit, his hands paused from whatever he was up to, and shook his head vigorously before speaking in disbelief, "You, you really did it?"

Mu Shang replied calmly, "Undeniably so!"

Ye Chong asked carefully, "Are you sure?"

Mu Shang, "I am sure!"

"Hah, hahaha, I can finally learn about the outside world, I can finally learn about the outside world..." Ye Chong jumped with glee, and hit the ceiling with excessive force.

Bang

Ye Chong was oblivious, as he continued to run about his house in excitement, fully relishing in his joy.

Mu Shang observed Ye Chong's emotional response, his cool face softening around the edges, but the moment was over in a flash as it resumed its usual composure.

Ye Chong carefully sat in Mu Shang's cabin, put on the helmet, and laid down silently on the soft seating, but his heart was anything but calm – there was excitement, hope, curiosity, and a little trepidation against the unknown setting. These plethora of emotions kept him agitated, unable to calm down.

Mu Shang's voice rang in his ear, "Ye, ready?"

For some reason, Mu Shang's voice had a calming effect on Ye Chong. Ye Chong took a deep breath, and answered steadily, "Ready!"

Just as he finished, Ye Chong's vision changed dramatically.

Ye Chong shook his head dizzily, and Mu Shang's voice returned when he felt better, "Users accessing the virtual net for the first

time would usually experience dizziness, this is normal, and has no negative health consequences.”

Ye Chong had a rough idea what that meant, and began to examine his surroundings.

The first thing he saw was a screen made up of intertwined light rays in a wide range of colors, those vibrant hues fluctuated and moved as though they were alive, creating and recreating new palettes!

The strong contrasts in sight moved Ye Chong like never before!

For Ye Chong, who grew up on a trash planet, the world was made up of only metallic blacks and whites, the yellow from the star’s rays, and the sweeping color of rust. He never thought colors could be so dazzling, so rich!

Ye Chong stood there, mystified, as he took in the most stunning view before him!

Someone passed by Ye Chong, noticed the look on his face, and swore under his breath, “Idiot!”

That swearing woke Ye Chong up from his fascination. Ye Chong could not help but felt a little bitterness, what would these upper class people know about his hard life? Fortunately, Ye Chong was not one to wallow in self-pity. After feeling lost for a while, Ye Chong picked himself back up.

As though sensing his change, Mu Shang, who was silent up until then, finally spoke up, “Ye, you can walk through the light screen now!”

Ye Chong obeyed, and came upon a huge square. The square was displaying all sorts of machines that Ye Chong could not even identify, and the middle of the square was occupied by a large electronic display, broadcasting all sorts of news and information.

“The Central Square is the news area, this is also my first time here, why don’t you have a look around yourself, if there are any

problems just call for me in your mind, as I can detect your brainwave signal! Alright! It's settled!"

Mu Shang's voice ended abruptly, leaving only silence.

Ye Chong smile wryly inside, but his worries were quickly replaced by intense curiosity. Ye Chong observed around him inquisitively, as he began to explore the area.

More than a decade's worth of survival instinct led Ye Chong to be highly vigilant in unfamiliar territory. He kept himself about two meters away from anyone around him at all times, as that was his best striking range, so that he could respond in time to any unexpected circumstances.

The ability to navigate quickly through the dense and irregular trash terrain on his home planet also added to his skillset, as he moved like a fish, slipping through the crowd smoothly and with style. On top of that, compared to the relaxing, strolling pace adopted by everyone else, Ye Chong moved as though he was in a rush for something urgent, but that was only because on the trash planet, every second was precious – it may be a matter of better returns, or a matter of life and death!

Ye Chong was like a vicious predatory fish wandering amongst the carefree, slow-witted fishes, obviously out of place, and a bit of an eyesore.

His foster father once said, outside of trash planets, humans live in peace and happiness – no countless life-threatening mutated lifeforms, no daily scheduled storms, no food-scavenging through the trash heaps. Instead, they wear bright clothing, eat fresh and fancy meals, living a life of peace and leisure. They go to school every day, with many friends, and they have many different kinds of mechs.

Ye Chong once asked his foster father longingly if it was paradise out there, but his foster father said no. Ye Chong was baffled – if a place like that wasn't paradise then what else can it be? The young

Ye Chong had spent countless occasions imagining the outside world as he thought it should be like – the mysterious, promised land of dreams-come-true.

Now, Ye Chong could finally experience the world he had long wished for!

Ye Chong could not really understand what he felt at the moment, as he walked on absentmindedly, not knowing where he really was.

Ye Chong stared blankly at the ceiling.

He did not exactly remember how he got back, his mind occupied by a lingering emotion, one that he couldn't really recognize. He would need time to process the day's experience.

Mu Shang said nothing, his silence made it hard for anyone to guess what lightning-speed calculations were running through his processor.

The ceiling was as it always was, unchanged, and the night was as silent as every other before it.

# Chapter 5: Training Day

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Ever since then, Ye Chong began to explore in earnest the mysterious and enchanting outside world. Out there, one can find almost anything, limited only by one's imagination. Ye Chong quickly warmed up to this illusory but undeniably real world. It took him no time to grow out of his initial shyness and be in his element.

And Mu Shang was up to something every day, coming and going as he pleased, disappearing almost immediately after accessing the virtual net every time.

Ye Chong's favourite place was a large township called Gutista. Various mechs were sold here, along with their weird parts and accessories. But most importantly, here was the meeting spot for many mech enthusiasts, where they frequently gather to exchange their thoughts on the machines. They were mostly mech engineers or professionals. The township's manager even installed a medium scaled mech information archive here, which Ye Chong was always appreciative of.

Ye Chong enjoyed the area's deep scholarly atmosphere, while the locals also happily embraced this eager and forthright young man, taking him under their wings. Through their guidance, Ye Chong began to understand how outdated his knowledge was, but it made sense.

Since all he knew were taught by his foster father, and the man had been isolated from the outside world for decades, it would only be weird if something from decades ago remained relevant today. Fortunately, Ye Chong had a solid foundation, and now he fully understood why his foster father was so strict with his foundation studies.

His solid foundation also made learning easier, as he took in new knowledge with great speed, and earned the favours of the older

men.

Today, as soon as he reached home, Ye Chong slipped into Mu Shang's cabin and put on the combat helmet. Although Ye Chong adored the virtual world, he did not lose himself in it. He understood that the trash planet was his real world, and if he became too immersed with the other world, he would face real danger on this treacherous trash planet! Ye Chong kept his defenses up every time he went outside, with his full attention, free of distractions.

Once on the virtual net, Ye Chong went straight to Gutista. But before he could catch his breath, Mu Shang's voice came up in his head, "Ye, let me take you somewhere."

Ye Chong felt intrigued. Mu was usually up to something these few days, absent from his own explorations.

Ye Chong followed Mu Shang's instructions as he turned left and right, finally arriving in front of a huge building. Many people bustled in and out of the structure, and the place teemed with life.

Ye Chong asked, curiously, "Mu, what is this place?"

Mu Shang explained, "This is the mech pilot's NR training centre, offering basic modules for pilots' NR training and a platform for pilots to compare notes. Your skills were self-taught, and many of them were illogical. I came about this place by accident and did an analysis of the training content, and while I believe there is a 7.63% imperfection in content, training here would be immensely helpful to improve your strength."

Ye Chong felt uncertain. "NR training? What's NR training?"

Mu Shang replied, "The full term is Neurosensory Reflexivity Training, it allows your neural system to remember specific manoeuvres. To execute manoeuvres that are up to standard in reality would require large amount of training for your body to achieve the required memory standard. However, a reasonable NR



training would greatly reduce this training time.”

Ye Chong began to have a grasp of things. “Oh, so it’s like that!” Regardless, if Mu Shang said it is beneficial, then it must be so, Ye Chong’s inner voice concurred.

The pilot’s NR training centre was built by the Fal Association for Mech Pilots, and formed part of the available basic facilities in the virtual world.

Ye Chong advanced into the main hall, neatly lined with many pillars. Some people could be seen passing by the pillars and vanished into thin air after a burst of light, and others seemed to flash into existence.

The current Ye Chong was no longer an amateur – he casually walked to a nearby pillar, lightly tapped on the pillar with his finger, and a semi-transparent screen appeared before his eyes.

Mu Shang introduced, “There are three areas above where we stand – the basic training area, the mixed training area, and the battle area. Since this is your first time, let’s try out the battle area.”

Right after Mu Shang finished, the screen display altered, showcasing the opponents for each room, and the number of audiences. Ye Chong picked one of the occupied rooms at random.

Swish and he was in the room, standing before a black mech. Ye Chong immediately recognized this as a beginner’s common choice of the Blackbird model, due to its ease of control, gentle learning curve and affordable price.

However, its functionality was at par with its status as an entry-level mech, armed with only a magnetic sword, platinum shield and two alloy daggers, not to mention the two redundant heat ray guns on its shoulders, with such low effectiveness that Ye Chong could not possibly count on them (but in reality, it’s because Ye Chong did not really know how to shoot).

The Blackbird looked like a huge, black bird, with two horizontal wings that could extend out like a pair of real wings, allowing beginners steadier flight in the atmosphere. Below the wings were two rows of secondary engines, although their functions were limited. Beneath the Blackbird's abdomen were two mechanical arms that could use the magnetic sword and alloy daggers. The heat ray guns were on the Blackbird's rear, the elongated neck allowing a wider range of shooting from different angles, although with the gun's power and Ye Chong's skill, or the lack of both, this advantaged was wasted.

But even if this was just an ordinary low-level mech, Ye Chong was already very excited – compared to Winnie, this mech's functionalities were much better.

Ye Chong entered the mech's cabin eagerly.

When Ye Chong had a good look at his opponent's mech, he could not help but felt greatly discouraged.

If his own mech was like an inconspicuous little bird, then the opponent's would be a glorious king of the birds – a phoenix! Its long elegant lines were like an artistic masterpiece, its dazzling and colourful wings and tailfins were like the phoenix's feathers, emanating an aura of great beauty. The flaming redness of the mech's body was a suffocating zeal. Even standing still, the mech exhibited an indescribable calmness and pride.

Its name mirrored its appearance – Shadow Phoenix, as fast as the shadow, as magnificent as the phoenix.

The Shadow Phoenix II model, the considerable amount of time spent at Gutista had made Ye Chong very familiar with it. Compared with the Blackbird, the two mechs were not even at the same level. The Shadow Phoenix II was a classic long-range attack mech, with great speed and advanced shooting systems as its signature features. Besides that, its beautiful exterior made it a popular choice for members of the female community. However,

to Ye Chong, those nearly useless wings were a burden, and what use was an attractive appearance if it became the constant attention of the enemy?

Without time for further pondering, Ye Chong received the signal to begin.

## Chapter 6: The Wavy Leap

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Almost simultaneously both of the mechs moved. A glaring light shone upon Ye Chong who had hid himself under the titanium shield caused him to tumble. It happened so quickly that it left Ye Chong standing up clumsily and helplessly finding out that he had been shot. The shield failed to perform its essential function to protect. The bullet penetrated it effortlessly straight to the edge of Ye Chong's rib on the left.

The opponent was perplexed realizing the fact that the shot was not able to finish Ye Chong off. Ye Chong in the meantime had discarded the titanium shield for it was deemed useless. He sprinted for his life, hiding behind rocks or any kind of debris to distract the opponent.

But the opponent was clearly equipped with battle skills. The calmness in the adversary suggested the trick did not work. SP-II's strength was thoroughly demonstrated through the second shot. No suspense, no drama, nothing epic.

After being knocked down countless, Ye Chong was enraged with his eyes reddened, demanding a rematch again continuously. Mu Shang's voice nonchalantly rang in his ears, "There are scientifically 62 kinds of strategic ways to dodge a shot, do you need me to teach you one?"

Ye Chong replied with a tantrum, "You rusty nuts and bolts! You just watched me die a gazillion times and all you could do was lie there and talk? Was that on purpose? Man, you really don't care much, do you?"

Mu Shang on the other hand responded with laid-back attitude, "Well, according to psychology, humans are more prone to remember pain and failure with a probability of 90 to 96% and by chance of 52 to 63%, the individual would utilize the experience as a motivating factor. Thus, I believe that by now the experience had

successfully been imprinted on your mind, had it not?”

Ye Chong leaped out of his mech as he spat, “You... You... You! You are good!” He had an urge to smash this piece of blabbering trash in front of him into pieces.

Mu Shang couldn't be bothered and pulled out a visual from nowhere. Ye Chong contained his fury and swallowed his anger as he closely viewed the video clip. It was a brief video clip that lasted less than 10 seconds. There was no space for Ye Chong to figure things out as his eyes were glued on every frame of the clip as Mu Shang's words echoed, “Look carefully!”

It was the same Raven-form mech but it was more nimble, so agile that it could perform non-orderly wave movements as smooth as the ripples in the sea. There was no point of stagnation, making its next move extremely unpredictable.

It was then that Ye Chong realized the beauty of the highest craft! His blood was burning as passion grew in him tremendously; the amazing skills the expert held could potentially be his! The desire!

Sun Xuelin couldn't help but gaze at the opponent named YC before her in awe, even though they were never at the same level; YC would always stand back up one defeat after another, a great tenacity that no commoner could muster.

The victory that came easily one time after another did not satisfy Xuelin. YC was undeniably a rookie in this; the mech he used justified it. A Raven is always a symbol for rookies. There was nothing triumphant about a victory won against a newbie to a person who had been properly trained since young like her.

And more strangely, whenever she received battle requests from YC, she could never resist clicking the “Accept” button in which the outsiders would only find the fight to be pointlessly boring. Of course a man of bravery should always be given a chance. Xuelin thought in order to comfort herself. She didn't notice at all, the curiosity that rose which bubbled deep inside her.

What kind of a person is YC?

At a place far, far away from Trash Planet-12, Xuelin bit her cherry lips, her expressive brows tightened, her sweet face melted into bitter ponders as this time, YC no longer sent battle requests to her but instead remained silent.

Is he finally giving up?

Xuelin exhaled a sign of relief. Well, if it wasn't the time to give up... The simple functions of a Raven could never dodge an attack from her SP-II. Right, time to give this rookie a lecture about the basics!

Before Xuelin could lift her lips, the battle request popped up in her face.

Are you not done yet? Your struggle is pointless! You should recognize the differences between both parties! Xuelin grumbled in her mind. Her hands acted faster than her mind and before she was aware, she had already hit the "Accept" button on the screen.

Hehe, just one more round I guess? Xuelin snickered as her expression lit up as bright as snow.

Ye Chong stared the ground between his Raven and the opponent's SP, his mind kept replaying the episode of the battle he experienced as his body cowered reflecting his anxiety.

Mu Shang once again interrupted with a nonchalant voice, "This set of dodging moves is called the Non-Orderly Wavy Leap. The key here is non-orderly. Focus on that." That was all he said, all he was willing and wanted to say. No more.

Ye Chong was angered to the point where he was clenching his teeth, but he couldn't do anything about Mu Shang. He could only put on his thinking cap, wondering how in the hell world would he figure out the meaning behind non-orderly. Easier said than done!

Non-orderly... non-orderly... non-orderly. He muttered the word repetitively.

Time waits for no one. Before Ye Chong could figure out what the heck non-orderly meant, the opponent had already accepted his request.

Ye Chong ignored all the confusions and could only focus on the previous incident. There's no time for non-orderly or whatever the heck it was! Think! That very orbit without any signs of movement, that amazing curve!

After maneuvering Raven for so many times, Ye Chong could finally have a better understanding on the properties of his machinery, rather than theories he could only recall before. This too gave him the painful truth that it would be nearly impossible for this mech to perform any fancy curves or leaps. Raven's computing system could never solve such complicated calculations! Very well then! It's only up to me now!

The only thing Ye Chong found fortunate was his piloting skill – that developed from everything he had been through with Winnie whose processor was far worse than Raven's!

Ye Chong started breathing heavily, his every breath as deep as an old accordion.

Beep!

Ye Chong's arm began moving! Raven flew like an arrow in a curve rather than a straight line it propelled in.

Almost instantaneously, Ye Chong was about to become a crater in the ground as he stood right before by the attack.

Ye Chong was too busy to take care of that; his eyes fixated on the ground, his blood boiled like the hot iron, as heat rushed to his head. Ye Chong executed a sequence of moves, one after another in an overwhelming speed without any hesitation. Raven was able to maintain its velocity at its peak!

Ye Chong's hands heightened with speed so much so that he couldn't figure out whether the vapor from his sweat caused the

afterimages of his chains of gestures. But he was too focused to give two thoughts about it! Like, who cares!

Xuelin was doing what she usually did, aiming and firing; but she missed. She brushed it off like it was nothing thinking it was merely beginner's luck. YC had dodged one or two shots randomly before this match with pure luck. In the end, his defeat was inevitable! Nothing was to be gained but a defeat rubbed in his face.

As time passed, Xuelin felt something was wrong...



# Chapter 7: Burn and Rest

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There were a few instances where Xuelin was about to fire, but something distressing was holding her back which made her awfully uneasy. The gun she held faithful at all times disappointed her, as if troubled by her emotions, and started to miss on every single shot.

Xuelin instantly pinpointed the peculiarity in YC's movement. It appeared sinuous yet wasn't at the same time.

Hmph! Trying to dodge my shots like a serpent huh? Too naïve, too naïve! Xuelin thought as she felt a sudden rage.

It's not a big deal to master the curvature skill because everyone has their own set of techniques, including YC. After engaging in countless of battles, it will be possible for one to identify these distinctive skills. The regularities in YC's curvature skill had already been spotted seeing that there were hardly any variations which Xuelin couldn't recognize!

She began to study and calculate his movements in her mind while her eyes locked on YC, picking out every variation in his movements, while waiting for the right time to shoot.

When the time came, she fired without hesitation.

Xuelin stared in bewilderment as the shot she fired missed!

As though he had foreseen this, he dodged the bullet with a twinkle in his eyes. Was this another case of his beginner's luck again or was there something more? Xuelin was flabbergasted as her thoughts circled in confusion. Taken aback by the whole ordeal, she went rampant on a barrel of firing on the field. Maybe it was a blessing from the God when one of her shots finally went through YC's left shoulder causing him to lose balance.

Ye Chong on the other hand was completely soaked by his sweat and his hands felt heavier over time; as if they were starting to

move on their own, seemingly twitching if this went on. He bit his lips out of panic and was already bleeding before he noticed it. In the midst of adrenaline rush, he felt a shudder from his mech which came to his realization that he was shot! Despite that, his hands continued to key in commands, as there was no time for him to find out the damaged part of his machinery.

Xuelin gushed with excitement for her successful shot that left YC hanging like a broken wind-up robot toy. A golden opportunity awaited before her! There's no way she could miss this! She loaded her gun and was prepared to send YC a final blow! Ironically, it was the hit that made YC's movements go haywire and became even more unpredictable than before. Naturally, it was not good news for Xuelin.

Coming to her senses on the aftermath, Xuelin's distress caused her firing to run wild on the field again! Meanwhile, Ye Chong finally caught sight of his opponent which triggered him, as well as his hands! It was as if they were electrified as they entered the commands at great speed!

It's getting closer now. It's coming!

Hiya!! Ye Chong roared like thunder in his compartment.

The opponent froze, taken aback by his scream. Was this a trap? Was there a plan B that she was not aware of? He no longer cared and had already drawn his magnetic sword from his back while his left hand reached for the alloy dagger tied to his left ankle.

As long as I can get close enough, the opponent would be dead meat!

He asserted himself and swung his sword; creating a buzzing echo formed from the magnetic waves of his sword. There was no resistance from the opponent as he sliced right through the throat. He was surprised at how simple it was. He was expecting a final struggle from the opponent as an inflicted wound on a machine's throat was as fatal as it was on humans but there was no

retaliation!

How could one make such an amateur mistake?

Having to live on Trash Planet-12 long enough he showed no mercy. He felt indifferent as he penetrated his dagger deeply and accurately like a serpent sinking its teeth into its prey; right on the upper chest of SP which would be the pilot's cabin. What YC heard next after the screeching sounds of metal shredding was the sound of applause for his victory.

In the meantime, Xuelin stared blankly in dismay at her floating chair; the network helmet she just disconnected was left levitating in the air. That very menacing figure that travelled speedily, that violent and direct attack, that tenacious bravery, lingered in the thoughts of Xuelin, haunting her.

Xuelin shifted to the dining table right after as it was dinner time.

Her father Ninghai saw her so lost in her thoughts that she ignored the scrumptious dinner on the table, pondering. He then beckoned to his wife but she just shook her head in helplessness of the situation. He asked her daughter, "Linny, what's wrong? Are you feeling unwell?"

Xuelin was startled as she wondered what had gotten into her and yet on the outside, she forced a smile, "Nothing. It's just that... I met an oddity on the battlefield today."

An oddity? Her father was intrigued.

"What kind of an oddity?" he inquired.

Xuelin's father was a skillful pilot of mechs. All of Xuelin's skills were taught personally by him. It was only then that Xuelin remembered the fact that her father was of such a superior rank in her field, he must have been experienced enough to solve this oddity for her! She then began to narrate the entire sequence of events to her father.

As soon as she mentioned about how YC failed again and again, Ninghai nodded his head in approval, “Good. I do agree this guy is pretty bold!” The conversation became light-hearted as she spoke on. When she talked about the final match with YC and how he portrayed extremely strange curvature skills as he drove towards her, her father’s face stiffened.

He asked for more details about the last match as he tried to stress on the whole incident to help her recollect her thoughts on details she might have missed. Her father reacted seriously, “If you were right on what you have described, this guy could have used a Non-Orderly Wavy Leap.

A set of dodging skills like this would only be known by advanced pilots. This is simply because not only does it requires a high-level manual piloting skill, it also requires a mech that is advanced enough. Only a sophisticated processor with a sophisticated mech could execute the complication in this set of calculation input.”

“But... but... he was only using a Raven!” Xuelin was puzzled.

“And that’s why this was such an eye-opener to me. Theoretically and under normal circumstances, a Raven could never complete such an execution. Reason being is that it has limited processing capabilities even with a master piloting it. Thus, there could only be one explanation for this. He must have modified it by installing a powerful processor into the mech.”

Xuelin gasped in disbelief, “But I still think he’s just a random rookie from out of nowhere!”

Seeing his daughter making such a statement, he snorted, “So what even if he’s just a random rookie from out of nowhere? Can’t a rookie modify his own machinery? Plus, it could have been his teacher or his senior who did the modifications for him to ensure compatibility with his special way of combat. But well this guy sure is something to be able to perfectly perform movements of such complexity!”

Still not convinced, Xuelin rebutted, “Well then, why did he not use it in the very beginning? Why only execute it after a myriad of lost matches?”

Startled, her father replied, “Oh, this part, huh? Well it’s... probably... because... umm... uhhhhh... ugh, Xuelin, let’s just finish up our dinner. We have already discussed this at length and look! The dinner got cold!”

Ninghai’s mother beamed at her husband who led himself into such an awkward situation.

Even if Xuelin’s father’s deduction made sense, somehow she still thought there was something amiss. The reality didn’t seem to be like what he had said to her. However, she could not point out exactly why she felt awry. Her gut’s feeling said so!

Nevertheless, just like how her father never expected that someone could perform this set of moves manually without the aid of the processor, Xuelin too never expected it in her mind.

The discussion was a cliffhanger of embarrassment as she knocked her head which felt like it was about to explode from her contemplation.

“Fine! Whatever! Never mind! Screw this! I’ll just ask him myself the next time we meet. Simple!” she thought.

# Chapter 8: Rehabilitation

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Ye Chong had just gotten himself into a sticky situation. He crawled out of his cabin, as if he just swam back to the shore, all drenched, drained of energy and fatigued. Something went wrong with him!

His hands looked fine but his fingers were squirming – Ughh! Ughhhh! – An ache that felt like it was seizing his bone marrows, rushing through his spines, and bombarding his brain one wave after another. If it wasn't for his great endurance, he might have passed out right away. He wheezed, barely catching his breath while his face turned pale from immense pain.

Despite the excruciating pain, both of his hands appeared alright to him. They were not swelling and there were no cramps. They seemed perfectly fine that not even a strand of hair was lost. Not a single one!

Mu Shang performed a thorough inspection of his body and expressionlessly diagnosed, “A symptom from overusing the senses, the neurological network connecting both your spinal cord and your hands had undergone abusive utilization that surpassed its capacity, thus causing the pain. The symptom will be temporary and will not cause permanent damage to your body. Resting adequately would be sufficient.”

The diagnosis received comments from Ye Chong packed with sarcasm, “Resting adequately? How the hell would I be able to rest adequately with such injuries? I can't even rest in peace!”

“There's a way to minimize the pain.” stated Mu Shang. That caught Ye Chong's attention, “Are you sure?” A pain that felt endless would torture him till death before he could overcome it, but if there's a way... The statement sparked hope in Ye Chong.

Mu Shang continued elaborating, “This method requires neither medication nor any form of injection, it is safe and effective. You

can feel its effects immediately...” Excited, Ye Chong interrupted the explanation, “Then, let’s proceed with it!”

“Are you sure about this?” Mu Shang halted and lowered his head, as he asked.

For some reason, the question suddenly sent chills down his spine. This doesn’t seem right... that face of Mu... I shoul-Ouch!

Nonetheless the pain forced him acquiesce, “Yes, I’m sure!”

Bam! A blow slammed right into the artery of his neck! He blacked out and the only thought that surged through his mind was man... it... it worked!

The voice of Mu Shang ran through the room, calm and still, “Execution completed.” As he sat before the fainted Ye Chong.

After waking up, Ye Chong could sense the transformation in his body clearly, especially in his hands. Everything felt incoherent. His body responded slower than his mind, his coordination was literally out of sync, no longer as compatible as it used to be.

Mu Shang added, “That is because your coordination has been disrupted. Your senses did improve tremendously beyond the limits you used to have, however your physical body remained the same as before and faced problems in coping with the processing speed of your mind. Consequently, you will feel sluggishness in your physical body but in actuality it is just your mind speeding up.”

Ye Chong understood the side effects described by Mu Shang and stopped entering the virtual web for the next few days. Instead, he performed physical training, especially dedicated to his hands.

On a platform about half a square meter in size, he concentrated on controlling six marbles and rolled them between his hands back and forth, netting all marbles in his hand and moving them at high velocity and rate of collision, in an ever-changing orbit. The velocity increased over time and beads of sweat could be discerned

on Ye Chong's forehead as his hands caught up with the speedy movement. Gradually the beads of sweat came falling down like droplets of rain on his forehead. His hands rushed like shadows overlapping till afterimages began to form. It's coming back!

In the end, he lost control and the marbles were scattered all over the place. He breathed heavily and ditched the marbles on the floor. Man this was too tiring! Mu Shang at the side evaluated Ye Chong, "It was still not satisfactory, but well, you passed!"

After finally ending his boring marble rolling days, Ye Chong started wondering if those marbles were purposely made by Mu Shang to torture people, both body and soul. Deep in his heart, he still adored Mu Shang. At least, thanks to Mu Shang, his hands felt like his own again and moved with better dexterity too.

Oh Winnie. Getting back to Winnie again was wonderful. It was heartwarming to see his broken partner again after taking a break from mech driving for so long. All this while, Ye Chong had been busy with the marble training and so his usual daily hunting was taken over by Mu Shang ever since his injury. Ye Chong was astounded by the fact that he couldn't find any other form of wounds on the prey Mu Shang hunted other than the small hole on the neck.

He frenzied in the field with Winnie, one mountain of dump after another while Mu Shang tailed behind at a fixed distance. That was the moment he could actually distinguish the changes in his hands before and after, more specifically the increased agility in his hands. As joyful as he was, he then remembered the steps Mu Shang taught him before. That Non-Orderly Wavy Leap which allowed him to taste the fruit of victory the very first time kindled the eagerness in him. He switched to the highest gear and chained with a variety of calculations, performed a live performance on the spot, with that great leap he adored.

Winnie at her age clumsily made a few disoriented orbits of different kinds under his control. Sometimes large and sometimes



small. Sometimes it was a straight curve and sometimes it was a zigzag. And that wasn't all from Ye Chong!

Being absolutely worked up, he continued making wavy leaps that were more condensed. In a brief period of time, Winnie began moving in tiny wavy steps at full speed. Unlike the disoriented curves before, they were all constant and orderly, while Ye Chong was still in the mood of making even smaller curves.

Ye Chong had grand plans of his own. Right when he was on his attempt to further downsize his steps, a loud noise drummed his ears. Winnie was finally unable to withstand the complexity and had broken into half.

Wham! Right at her waist!

Ye Chong's joy became fear. He did not manage to call Mu Shang for help as he had been thrown like a meteorite, all the way to the huge pile of dumps nearby along with the upper half of Winnie. Ye Chong had a concussion and was buried by the pile he crashed into.

Darkness blinded Ye Chong.

When Ye Chong... wait, technically it was Winnie, not me. Again. When Winnie got pulled out from the deep piles of trash by Mu Shang, Ye Chong saw the teasing expression of Mu Shang's contrary to the usual expressionless face he put up, and it was extremely frustrating. The frustration intensified when Ye Chong was on his way home – he waws being carried by Mu Shang like a disabled person. The helplessness! And the teasing from Mu Shang he anticipated!

He was frustrated, yet he was truly helpless without Winnie. Mu would never allow Ye Chong to pilot him either. Moreover, a rookie riding on a beginner? That felt too absurd.

Can't help it. I am too weak in contrast!

The foremost issue was still losing his mech. No matter how old

Winnie was, she was still significant to Ye Chong's life, if there was no replacement that is. By then he could only plead Mu to bring Winnie's lower part of her body back. Regretting the consequences of his excitement, his heart turned cold. He should have known how aged Winnie already was and should've been aware of how long she had served him over the ages. It was a miracle for her to last this long and now she was damaged in a way that is fatal even for ordinary mechs. It would be hopeless to get her fixed, especially when it happened in a place where there was nothing else other than piles and piles of trash.

Never forgetting to spice up the situation with sarcasm Mu said, "Ye, I can't stop myself but to tell you the ultimate truth of cruelty. The possibility to get Winnie fully repaired would be 1% and below! So stop gambling with a chance this low! It is against the value theory! In layman's terms, it's not worth it!"

Sorrow could be seen in Ye Chong when the realization of his helplessness struck him. He went into Mu Shang's cabin and then, into the virtual web.

Mu Shang didn't seem to feel like behaving empathetically as his words echoed, "According to statistics, you have yet to master the 68 kinds of basic courses. This is the list!" Stuffed right in his face was the absurdly long list to which he responded with ignorance as drove on. The robot went silent for a bit and spat out, "Ye, if one day your skills surpasses me, I would let you ride me."

He halted, got out and walked away, without making a sound or throwing a tantrum.

## Chapter 9: Bucking Up

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It was almost the 8th year since Winnie started staying by his side. They had been through thick and thin, and rode through piles of garbage of varying heights. Winnie shielded him from raids and protected him from extreme weather. Winnie was the reason for his survival. It was his reassurance in life. She might be worn out but in her lay the kindest elderly soul he could have asked for, in which she faithfully and dutifully fulfilled by serving her owner for the past few years.

Something felt trapped within Ye Chong. What was it? Through all the years that Ye Chong lived, there was only once when he felt such a sensation, and it was during his father's death.

Is this grief?

He whispered to himself.

I wonder if papa was doing fine on the other side?

Holding his chin, he thought in an endearing misery.

For the whole day, he spent his time alone at a deserted spot on the planet. After that, he made his way to the training center and called Mu Shang.

“Mu, show me the course plan!” he said in a casual tone.

...

In the meantime, Xuelin was irritatedly occupied.

These few days she searched every single room on the battlefield, longing for a rematch with that person that left her with more questions than answers. That YC guy. Though disappointment slapped her in the face again and again upon seeing rooms with anyone else other than YC, she was not going to give up. If YC could face failure or any kind of letdown over and over again, so could she. The encouragement rang in her head.

Yet, this is going to be another wild goose chase today!

The day seemed to be anticlimactic as expected. Meh! I'll just go and visit Cousin Shew. She should be at the basic training field.

Cousin Shew was the daughter of her second aunt and they had been good friends since childhood. Unfortunately, Cousin Shew had failed her mech examination several times before. Her mother thought of Xuelin's father, Sun Ninghai, while she was thinking of a solution. She then begged the great man to enlighten her poor daughter so she could pass. Still, the man was great for a reason. He was so engaged in his work routine, he didn't even have the leisure to keep the promise. As a result, the promise was inherited by Xuelin.

The basic training field was used to its vacancy. At most, there would only be a few people using it. Most pilots-in-training did not fancy the NR training for its efficiency in comparison to actual hands-on pilot training. In addition, these were so elementary that everyone had mastered the training back during their early childhood. The emptiness of the field was justified.

Idly, Xuelin browsed through the rooms on the field. The room Cousin Shew was in was soon found and she entered immediately. It was a spacious, open land with a number of obstacles on the ground. Cousin Shew was unsteadily walking through. Xuelin did not intend to interrupt the training her hardworking cousin was having. She just watched on at the spectator stands.

Wait, there's another person!

A dark silhouette slithered through the obstacles at an overwhelming speed. Who would still train here with such standard of piloting? She went to have a closer look.

Wha! She was dumbfounded. That... That...

That has to be YC! YC! She hopped excitedly. Yes! It's him! It's him! The wound she made that day was still on the left shoulder of

his Raven! And the scratches on the rib! Yes! It must be him!

Is this what they mean by “God never disappoints the studious” and “Heaven would help those who help themselves”?

She mumbled.

Ye Chong frowned as he checked out the data shown on Raven. Almost. He muttered. He was so close to Mu’s standards. It was so near, yet so far. How many times have he tried already yet he still couldn’t pass?

“Ye, with your learning capacity and basic theoretical knowledge, it would not be hard to complete the basic training courses, instead it would be a piece of cake! But if you find such standards satisfactory, you should never think of touching me. At all!”

“Most people deny the significance of training. However, they are so foolishly wrong!”

Mu Shang sounded like a hermit in his teaching, sassy and aloof and this brought up a raging storm in Ye Chong, an unstoppable one!

“According to my calculations, 99.328% of actions of high complexity are actually derivations from basic execution. Thus, I could daringly conclude that, basic executions are the root of all pilot’s skills!” Ye Chong reflected on the statement.

Mu Shang pulled out a detailed list of parameters, “Ye, these are the training requirements I had prepared for you. The standard has been tailored for Raven’s capacity accordingly. Just do everything on this list!” Mu Shang’s mechanical eyes blinked.

“Remember, Ye, never acknowledge the existence of limits within you!”

Ye Chong took the suggestion with pleasure. After staying on Trash Planet-12, he was more than eager to try improvising himself. Nonetheless, he forgot about Mu’s hysteria, the capricious

and mischievous nature of his. Those parameters... were impossible to achieve by Raven's capacity... at all!

He faced the reality of this after going through the training. He worked on them through days and nights, whimpering, spitting blood and then he finally made it. Just one of them. That was an achievement joyous enough to make him cry.

“Good job, Ye.” Mu Shang smiled, “But you still need a little bit more momentum. Yes, yes, a motivating factor is what you would need! I should implement a system that includes rewards and punishment. How about this? If you fail to fulfill at minimum one (1) subject on the list after this, you would be having an organic liquid diet for a week. That'd be good! Yes!”

Mu sneered on as Ye Chong witnessed it. He didn't have a choice, without Winnie, only Mu could do the hunting! You fox! Ugh!

Ye Chong hated liquid diet, flow food, fluid food, or whatever you name it! He hated it with a passion since he was young, be it organic or not. He had to make it! By hook or by crook!

Soon it was the last day of the week, if he did not succeed, he was going to be fed with the infamous white, sticky, gooey liquid food for real! Just by looking at it was enough to choke him. It was so disgusting that only a man who had lost his mind would consider eating it!

What was the problem? Why could he not make it? Ye Chong knew Mu well. He would never simply set parameters that a Raven could not fulfill. But why, why was it always so close? Ye Chong was collecting his thoughts pitifully.

...

Cousin Shew who was in training spotted her cousin on the stands, in which she quickly piloted her Raven towards. That did not go too well, however. Her skills were way too incompetent that the Raven was led to a floating metal pole.

Bang! Cousin Shew panicked, screaming and shouting loudly until the entire field could hear her.

The scream alerted Xuelin who was staring at YC since the beginning. She was horrified seeing the Raven her cousin drove stuck in mid-air and was apparently going to fall anytime soon.

“This is bad!” she thought.

Cousin Shew had always portrayed a fragile, timid impression since her childhood and that was why she never thought of driving a mech. If she ever fell, the shock would land her in bed for the next few months! Or even worse, a trauma in her memories forever! Then, she would not even dare to approach a mech ever again!

Xuelin immediately got onto her SP-II and moved towards Cousin Shew at maximum speed, hoping to grab her before she fell. But there were too many random obstacles in the air, and those halted her. Cousin Shew would hit the ground in no time and she could not reach her! Tears flooded her eyes as it was filled with anxiety. No!

Meanwhile, the scream from Cousin Shew had also alarmed Ye Chong as he turned his head and noticed a mech of the same Raven he piloted too. He did not hesitate and began inputting commands, his Raven glided to its compatriot on a whim.

Perhaps it was the conscience sunken deep in his mind, in which he wished for a companion more than anybody else after his lonely days with Mu. There was no time to think, and those scattered obstacles relived the scenery of the hunting field he used to go to. The set of inputs he learned over the past week flashed in his mind. As if awakening, he subconsciously began inserting commands without difficulty. He turned out to be much slower than usual in the end!

Ye Chong's Raven weaved its way through the flock of obstacles, like a breeze on a spring day, naturally, freely and directly. Right

when the other Raven was about 3 meters from the ground, his Raven caught it in one go. He gradually decelerated and made one last glide for a short distance. He then landed successfully.

“There! All done!” he exclaimed as he put down the Raven.

About 2 seconds later an SP-II came after him. It must be the ally of the Raven. He speculated enviously while the mech was landing right in front of him. That seemed, oddly familiar... ahh! This was the SP-II he matched with the first day he was here! He nodded slightly in respect as he watched it inching towards him.

He intuitively took a look at the processor. What?!



# Chapter 10: Dummy Ends

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I actually completed the training!?

Ye Chong's brain jammed for a bit seeing the notification on the interface. How the heck did he even get it done?! He hopped onto Raven and started going through the training programs, disregarding the number of tries and the ways he had done them. The parameters were all fulfilled, which perplexed Ye Chong.

How did I even make it?

...

Ugh, nevermind!

He wasn't that keen to get to the core of this mystery anyway! What was more important lay in fact that there was noteworthy advancement made in his piloting skill and most importantly, no liquid diet the following week! Oh joy!

He did not stay any longer and ejected himself from the virtual web. To the marble training! The marbles were waiting for him! Though he had recovered from the desynchronized body movement symptom, Mu added marble training to his daily training schedule ever since Winnie got damaged. It might seemed meaningless at first, but after the training, Ye Chong learned the fact that speed was indeed... not everything!

Returning to the virtual web, Xuelin was trying to calm her poor cousin down, as she probably was intimidated from her near-death experience a moment before. Xuelin held great appreciation towards YC. Thanks to him, Cousin Shew was saved right at the nick of time.

Imagine if this YC guy was never there, oh the tragedy that could have happened. Wait... Her mind drifted to another perspective of this incident. He was at a location further away from her yet he managed to make it there before her. Add to the fact that the

velocity of his machinery was apparently higher than her... Fear shrouded her thoughts in which immense curiosity soon dipped through. How did he elevate his ability at this rate? Or the match with him was just one of his warm-up activities last time? Was there indeed a let up from him?

Her pupils quivered in anxiety, her hair slid over her shoulder tussled in worries, while her body shuddered in thin fragility; Cousin Shew's pale face frigidly portrayed the panic that lingered in her heart, like a distressed flower bud trapped in a storm of winter, pitifully arousing the empathy of its witnesses.

Xuelin lovingly caressed the poor flower, combing her smooth hair with her fingers. Cousin Shew couldn't hold it in anymore as she melted completely in Xuelin's embrace, sobbing out her every horror. Xuelin's fingers slipped through her shoulder, comforting her like a big sister.

In actuality, their ages did not differ much. Cousin Shew was just younger by about 10 days, but her fickle innocence justified her relationship with Xuelin, being the little sister walking behind Xuelin the whole time. In fact, Xuelin too, loves and cares about her little sister, for she was stronger in nature and was aided by her father's teachings.

Under her protection, nobody would even dare touch the petite flower. To Cousin Shew, she is her protector. About two years ago, her aunt and the entire family moved out and so they forcibly parted, yet her dependency on Xuelin never faded.

"Now, don't cry, don't cry, Shewie, let's go home first okay? G-o. H-o-m-e!"

She nodded in obedience and exited the virtual web under her cousin's escort. Xuelin took a glance at the battlefield before clicking the exit button...

Did he notice me? That I was the one who shot him... Was the nod for me? When I was landing...

Confusion cloaked her once more, without her even knowing why.

...

The second day, Ye Chong resumed his daily training with a brand new parameter to be cleared. This time, there was a different content in a different room. On the first day, it was still this parameter that was crudely executed by Ye Chong even though he was fully attentive. He was hard at work absorbed in his training that he did not see two uninvited guests approaching him. They had observed him for quite some time.

Was that even the YC guy I knew from the battlefield yesterday? This guy that caused me anxiety? It was Xuelin, whose mouth gaped large enough to fit in a hard-boiled egg as she watched on. She couldn't believe her eyes upon seeing that YC guy that was doing everything... so clumsily.

From an expert falling to an amateur again, even if this was conducted in the basic training field, it was still as shocking as a human eating an aliens, not to mention the training was something she had accomplished when she was about 8 to 9 years old.

Yet, his performance was extremely uncoordinated. The shock in Xuelin just skyrocketed from surely, to very, to immensely, and to extremely, and it was still multiplying!

Hasn't he done his basic course? If he did, why is he still here? And doing it this badly? If he did not, how in the world could he execute expert-only wavy steps? Beginner's luck? Is he hacking?

The only conclusion that these clues could lead to was – this was really an oddity!

Cousin Shew had her eyes fixed on that Raven-in-training. In her eyes sparkled the biggest mystery of mankind, and of what she was thinking. The YC guy might have been unskillful, but he still had

the attention from the two girls on the stand throughout the training.

“Hey, what? Shewie, why are you still here? Are you going to do your training?” Xuelin managed to pull her eyes away and asked. Shewie, the lass, was standing all upright, watching that man piloting his Raven, while not even moving a muscle of her own. “Don’t tell me... you were frightened by the incident yesterday? Were you?” This connected the circuit back in Cousin Shew’s head, her face reddened right away, “Ah! Uh, um, ah, uh, uhh, I... I’ll... I’ll do it right now!” She tripped on her way to her Raven.

Likewise to her pilot tripping, the Raven tripped a few times in the air as well, seemingly about to fall down again anytime soon, “Don’t worry Shewie, it’s going to be alright, just calm down, I’m here, right here!” in cold sweat she said.

The Raven was bewildered as it entered the field. “What’s wrong, Shewie?” Xuelin asked, seeing the Raven just hovering in the air. She then heard sniffs and sobs, “Xuelin, I think I... I... I... I forgot everything I learned yesterday!”

...

....

.....

Holding her forehead, Xuelin breathed deeply, those words were a strong fainting spell. Ye Chong with his focus about all the meals he could possibly have for the following weeks literally failed to notice the interesting sisters at the stands doing their Titanic git. If the sisters were to come closer, they might have overheard the madness in the cabin of the training Raven, “Meat. Meat. I need meat. Hand me the meat and no one gets hurt...”

Mu Shang was such a stern and demanding teacher. Even Ye Chong’s toes could tell that, the training this time must be another bottomless trap hole of hell difficulty where he had to crawl out by

clawing his way with his Raven. He repeated his monotonous training and lost the sense of time. He only found his stomach rumbling inside him due to his hunger when Mu Shang decided to give him a kind reminder of his dinner time.

Exit. Ye Chong pressed, leaving the interesting sisters staring at the blank spot he left, astonished.

Ever since then, it seemed to have become their additional routine to check the YC guy out daily.

Of course even a so-called “incompetent” greenhorn like Ye Chong would have noticed. Being alert anytime, anywhere was the survival sense ingrained in Ye Chong. But the two mechs were merely watching him from afar, hovering in the air quietly, with no other interference coming from them.

He feigned ignorance. But still... he did not get it. The content of his training had nothing sophisticated, in fact, it was also minimal. Weren't they annoyed by it?

It was none of his business anyway.

He just continued training as they watched on. He told himself that if he did not work hard enough, the muddy pile of unknown substance would await him at the dining table when he got home. Liquid diet for the next week! The trio never talked to each other, at most, they nodded at each other.

Time passed and Ye Chong made a breakthrough in his training. He could manipulate 10 metal marbles at once for one and a half hour continuously, along with his improved physique. He could feel the strength increasing with certainty. Speed-wise, he was 5 times faster, and strength-wise, he was 7 times stronger. As for reaction speed, he became 11 times faster compared to the past. The puzzling part of his development was that his weight had hardly increased. Even Mu Shang did not expect this.

By then, Ye Chong could already hunt simple creatures on his

own without relying on any mech. He could prove his strength in this aspect.

He was holding a thin blade in his right hand and a nicely roasted drumstick from the engulfer, as he swiftly sliced pieces of them with the blade while they formed circles as they fell. He gently picked them up with the point of his blade, and tossed them into his mouth. As he got faster and faster, it almost reached the point of a bazooka firing multiple slices of meat into his mouth. Ye Chong thoroughly enjoyed the sensation of such a feast.

In the process, he discovered that if he could slice the meat thinner than ever, the scent of the grill could be retained while the texture would turn softer, like a heavenly touch on his tongue melting away into wonderful grease. The thinner the better!

The drumstick shrunk over time, and soon after that, only a stalk of bone remained in his grip. It glowed brightly, looking clean as if it had been washed, wiped and waxed.

He exhaled and tossed the bone away, stretching his back. “Mu, all things listed in the basic course were completed yesterday. What is there for today?”

The training days seemed tough yet it was more accomplishing than the days he had lived before. However, losing sight of his goal had made him dazed once again.

And that was the time he recalled the SP-II and Raven he saw every time, hovering over the field. We didn’t even speak... I just nodded when they nodded too! I wonder if we would ever meet again... A sense of longing suddenly grew in Ye Chong for the two strange yet familiar friends he made.

I think I ought to tell them that I will no longer go to the training field tomorrow onwar-Wait. Maybe not, meh. Ye Chong decided against it right away. Friend? Pfft. What if we were just acquaintances? I guess I’m the one who has been thinking too much. We aren’t from the same world in the end! Seems like it

would be better to leave it just like this. If I were able to leave Trash Planet-12, maybe I would still stand a chance, but...

Ye Chong started his wild imagination on the scenarios of the what-ifs if he did or did not befriend them officially.

Mu Shang on the other side of the room mumbled, “Practical. We are doing practicals. Gain some experience from it, then we can proceed to the more advanced courses.” The answer from Mu Shang was more exciting than the silly fantasies in Ye Chong’s head, in which he ended instantly.

“Practical? Alright! I love practical! Man do you know how boring it is to train all day and night?”

After training all this while, he could finally obtain the opportunity to flaunt his moves. Ye Chong looked forward to his practical day with much enthusiasm!

# Chapter 11: Against a God

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Ye Chong stared at the mech before him, thoughts racing through his mind. Here was a ten-meter tall humanoid mech, armed with a silver shield on its left shoulder that glistened like mercury under the soft interior lighting. The fire sabre wielded by its right hand was a flame shaped into a weapon. Its grey body was elegant, and the golden ornaments on its forehead were a stunning addition to its appearance.

This was obviously a modified mech. Its dual axle shield functions at above average compared to other accessories, but his Raven's magnetic sword would barely be able to scratch it. Although the fire sabre was a medium level weapon, it would probably only take a few hits to cleave the Raven in half – a strike on a weak point of his mech would be fatal. The mech's body structure was well designed for defending against attacks, and its good weight distribution avoided overloading the mech's engine. There were also a few weapons for long range attacks.

This was a brilliant creation! Ye Chong realized as he examined the mech thoroughly.

If Ye Chong were to judge this mech, he would summarize it in one word – graceful! Despite being equipped with various mid-level accessories, a well-rounded pilot could do plenty of damage with it.

Ye Chong believed its engine was probably either a Parham or a Swordfish-IV, for only these two engine models could bring out the best of the mech and its accessories.

A mech that could do well in both attack and defense which was also armed with long-ranged and short-ranged attacks would be a formidable opponent. Ye Chong found it hard to believe that he would meet such a strong opponent in his first battle.

However, Ye Chong was not troubled by negative emotions such as fear and worry. Life on the trash planet made him realize that



the types of enemies he battled was beyond his control. There was only one concern – how to defeat the enemy!

Ye Chong wanted to use his ray guns but even a direct hit would hardly be a threat to the enemy.

What about alloy daggers? Oh dear, the daggers would surely yield under the opponent's sturdy structure. He thought to himself.

Fortunately, all hope was not lost, for his magnetic sword could withstand some damages though it would take three strikes on the same spot to break the mech's armor; which would be a great difficulty.

Ye Chong mused at the thought.

Ye Chong analyzed the mech for its weaknesses. He had learned from experience that no adversary was perfect; a well-aimed strike at the most vulnerable spot would tip the scales in battle, and that was the key to winning against stronger opponents.

Undoubtedly, the throat was the most vulnerable spot in the majority of humanoid mechs due to the presence of high density of photon nodes. Even a little damage could cause the mech to malfunction, and the neck's extremely bulky armor greatly reduced its flexibility. Others would find the throat an awkward position to defend against with the exception of heavily armed mechs. However, that was common knowledge amongst mech pilots, therefore it would be expected to find the throat carefully guarded.

Ye Chong eventually dismissed this approach.

As for the pilot's cabin, it will be a no-brainer that pilots would not leave themselves exposed! Unlike the throat, a humanoid mech's pilot cabin is located at its chest area where the armor is thickest. Even if Ye Chong managed to burst through the cabin area with his magnetic sword, it would take at least a dozen strikes

to damage the armor. The odds of him surviving so many close range attacks with the fire sabre wielded by his opponent did not look promising.

What now? Ye Chong grew desperate in planning his strategies.

But time waits for no man – with the soft ring of the bell, the battle began!

Ye Chong cleared his mind and focused on his opponent.

Jeb sat casually in his mech, smiling mesmerizingly under his aquiline nose; his golden hair was naturally wavy, much like a prince from a fairy tale. His posture was elegant, and his movements majestic. His intense brown eyes studied the Raven with a hint of sneer.

Jeb scoffed, “Truly, one does not learn to fear what one does not understand! How dare you challenge my dear Apollo with a Raven? Ah, looks like yours truly will have to teach you a lesson!” The scorn in his tone was apparent.

Jeb decided to give Ye Chong a little “lecture”. When the countdown of the battle ended, he charged straight for the Raven with his prized Apollo. He did not bother to activate the mech’s shooting systems, or his dual axle shield.

The Raven remained static as though surrendering to its faith awaiting for a fatal blow.

“Ah, what a poor and unlucky fellow! A battle with yours truly was your greatest misfortune!” Jeb mocked. These days, Jeb was not feeling exactly cheery, and this battle served as an opportunity to vent off his displeasures. I shouldn’t finish him off so soon, Jeb snickered darkly.

As both opponents closed in on one another, Jeb whipped out his fire sabre; the flames flickering menacingly, as it yearns for damage.

Jeb anticipated for his opponent to be outright panicking and

flustering. As the Raven's wings received a heavy blow from his attack, the game of cat and mouse finally commenced. Jeb smiled wickedly, delighted with the destruction.

The game has only just begun! Jeb thought pleasingly.

There was no shooting involved despite being the fastest and safest strategy against his Raven which confuses Ye Chong.

Jeb's mech closed in slowly, and Ye Chong thought it was odd. If his opponent chose a close-ranged battle, why not take advantage of the mech's speed?

As the mech's fire sabre attacked his left wing, Ye Chong was even more confused. Why ignore vulnerable spots of the Raven to unnecessarily strike at a left wing? Even the dual axle shield was not utilized, leaving its chest defenseless. The fire sabre's attack was also more style than substance – the quivering flames only for show; the attack itself weak and badly angled. Thoughts raced through his mind as he contemplated about reasons behind these forms of attack.

Ye Chong was bewildered thinking that a pilot armed with such marvels was making absurd ambushes!

Regardless, Ye Chong was presented with a golden opportunity, and he would not miss it!

The Raven instantaneously accelerated reaching its maximum speed as Ye Chong sidestepped, dodging the fire sabre effortlessly. His magnetic sword hooked upwards at an angle and scraped past the enemy; leaving a gash of five-centimeters deep and was about one meter long across the enemy's hull. The gash stood out like a condescending smirk. Before the enemy could retaliate, the Raven took advantage of its momentum and aimed its left wing at the opponent's chest.

The two mechs met at high speed, and with a loud BANG they clashed and bounced off each other awkwardly to the sides.

Ye Chong was prepared for the high speed collision, and maneuvered away with ease. His basic training had taught him how to handle collisions, and Mu Shang's strict coaching regimen allowed him to decide where to land right when the current collision occurred.

Ye Chong adjusted the controls with astounding swiftness, and the Raven's twelve secondary engines located along its sides roared to life like music to his ears, angling the mech with precision. He managed to power up in split seconds.

All twelve secondary engines rumbled in sync – the Raven, now twenty centimeters from the ground, paused slightly in mid-air – as the claws on its right limb flexed out and its wings angled accordingly. The Raven sprang off the ground like a graceful raptor, and headed back for the skies.

The black mech flew along a graceful arc, and at the peak of its parabolic trajectory was the Apollo, still recovering from the collision.

Even as an entry level mech, the Raven's maximum speed was not to be underestimated. In a blink of an eye, the Raven was already at Apollo's tail.

Jeb was still dazed and unresponsive from the collision, and Apollo was left without its pilot.

Its throat came into view, and Ye Chong locked in on his opponent's most vulnerable spot like a predator ready to pounce on its prey.

Ye Chong howled in anticipation, and thrust his magnetic sword with breathtaking speed into Apollo's throat – much like a knight of ancient times charging with his lance at full speed towards the enemy's throat. The force of the lunge greatly exceeded Ye Chong's expectations as the Apollo was flung far across the battlefield like a puppet; its thickset neck now barely intact, and the photon circuits all jumbled up.

The seemingly impossible victory was overcome almost by instinct.

Ye Chong had won!

## Chapter 12: Onwards and Upwards

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His opponent asked for a rematch, but Ye Chong ignored him. The way he saw it, the deliberate mistakes committed by his adversary would have cost his life a dozen times, and what Ye Chong needed was an expert that could sharpen his skills to grow stronger, not a brazen fool like him.

Mu Shang swiftly appeared by his side. “Hmm, not a bad performance, but the opponent was pathetic!”

Ye Chong nodded in agreement.

Mu Shang asked, “However, it seems that the Raven can no longer keep up with your battle skills. Hmm, are you interested in using another mech?”

Ye Chong beamed at Mu Shang’s suggestions. “A new mech? What model?”

“What are your thoughts on the Apollo?” Mu Shang inquired.

Ye Chong speculated before replying, “It’s alright! It’s pretty agile with thoughtful modifications!”

“You win points for every victory in battle, and these points can be traded for new mechs or accessories at the maintenance hub, as mech modifications are allowed here. Of course, I advise that you refrain from using modified mechs for now even though you are not entirely new to it. My suggestion would be for you to get familiar with various mechs before exploring the options offered by modifications.” Mu Shang explained.

Mu Shang barely finished his little speech before Ye Chong headed straight for the maintenance hub. The spacious main hall exhibited a great variety of mechs, and Ye Chong eyed the displays like an eagle as he wandered around the displayed mechs, occasionally petting or caressing the machines, unable to hide his excitement.

Ye Chong instantly realized that every mech was labelled with the amount of points required for redemption. He fumbled with his phone scrolling through his incoming messages and finally found what he was looking for – a thousand points under his name. Ye Chong heaved a sigh of relief – fortunately, the Green Wolf mech offered two models, and each only cost three hundred points. Looks like I have quite a number of points. Ye Chong thought gleefully.

Ye Chong decided to heed Mu Shang's advice as Mu was never one for thoughtless opinions.

Even though he eyed the other mechs longingly, his decision was finalized – he decided on a sophisticated Green Wolf-I.

The Green Wolf was a quadruped; built very much like a wolf, with a double-bladed light sabre held in its mouth – both sides of the weapon are capable of activating laser sabers of half a meter long. The Green Wolf model was a classic mech for land battles although it lacked the Raven's wings; rendering flight impossible, and its engines were not designed for optimum performance in space. On land, however, the mech's powerful drive, agile movements and commensurate speed made it a popular model.

Compared to the Raven, the Green Wolf came with quite a few upgrades.

Mu Shang appeared like a spirit before Ye Chong, and threw a quick glance at the Green Wolf behind him before commenting in earnest, "Tis' an alliance between beasts!"

Ye Chong glared back at Mu Shang. "You dare compare me to a beast?!"

Mu Shang replied lazily, "Are you not one?"

"Of course I'm not!" Ye Chong defiantly sulked.

"Then what are you?" Mu Shang retorted.

Ye Chong declared shamelessly, "I am the king of beasts!"

Mu Shang was flabbergasted, and couldn't help but surrender and roll its eyes. "Definitely like a beast!"

Ye Chong stood proudly with his arms akimbo, and the background music began to play the roar of a thousand beasts. The music changed abruptly replaced by the raucous cries of beasts having sex. Ye Chong felt goose bumps all over him, and immediately begged Mu Shang for mercy.

Mu Shang chuckled, and reasoned languidly, "But you are the King-- of-- Beasts--!"

Ye Chong pulled a face.

Mu Shang tossed a name list to Ye Chong. "The names recorded here are those who have a winning rate of over 90%, and had registered for training here within the last three months. You should challenge them one at a time. Oh, and do remember to start from the last one on the list."

Sun Xuelin and Xiu stared at the empty training ground in dismay.

Xiu announced flatly, "Xuelin, he's not here." Inside the Raven's cabin, tears began to flow down her delicate contour.

Xuelin was enraged. "That bastard, he's crossed the line, we've known each other for so long how can he just upped and left without so much as a goodbye? This is too much. I'm going to give him a real beating the next time we meet!" She had completely forgotten her losing track record against Ye Chong.

"Let's check out the battle grounds!" Xuelin said as she grabbed Xiu by the arm.

They searched the battle areas one by one, but there was neither a sight of the Raven, nor the one who piloted it.

They were not aware of Ye Chong replacing the Raven for another mech, and were also ignorant of the fact that he had left the battle area for Gutista right before their arrival on the battle



grounds.

“Hey! Young man, what’re you up to these days? Haven’t seen you in a while!” An elderly man greeted Ye Chong as he was on his way to Gutista.

Ye Chong gave a slight bow. “Grandpa Xu, how do you do? My schedule’s a little hectic with training these days, hence the absence.” The elderly named Xu was someone Ye Chong respected dearly, for he was an old engineer who was generous with his teachings, and Ye Chong had benefited much from the old man.

Grandpa Xu chortled, “This old man is doing quite well, and this young man here is still as polite as always! What a nice lad, them old folks must be happy to see you there! Well then, I must be off, you enjoy yourself young man!”

Ye Chong smiled bashfully. “I will, have a good day Grandpa Xu!”

Ye Chong visited the central hub of an association in Gutista called Aurora. The association was infamous; its members consisting mainly of retired mech engineers and pilots of high stature with great knowledge on all things mech. The conglomeration of these individuals was a force to reckon with. Many existing companies consulted with them for their renowned expertise. The eccentricities of the association’s members were also well known where each member offered a unique set of skills and experience. The fact that the members retired with enviable pensions made financial rewards ineffective as a means of gaining their assistance. If they find someone amenable, they would offer help even if unasked for; if one is unpleasant, even a shipload of gold would not change their minds. Their disregard for money was always a cause of concern by various companies.

However, the stakes were high, so the superiors have to lower their sights and dance to the members’ peculiar tunes, while secretly cursing them for their humiliation. It did not help that most Aurora members were well-versed in the art of politics and

negotiations – the company executives who were used to taking advantage of others had found their match!

# Chapter 13: A Kind of Peace

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Ye Chong was the only Aurora member under the age of fifty.

His membership was the result of an accident. In one of his early days in the virtual world, Ye Chong entered the Aurora's central hub by accident. However, none of the members paid him any attention, as they were either engrossed in some group discussion or conducting their own research. Ye Chong, driven by curiosity, approached the noisiest group in the room, and was surprised to find that they were discussing the piping designs for mech engines. Ye Chong was very much interested, and soon became absorbed with the discussion at hand.

There were two old men who proposed two different design solutions, and both were stubbornly defending their own positions.

Ye Chong was reminded of Mu Shang's engine schematics, and inadvertently spoke up, suggesting an entirely new approach. Suddenly, the group went very quiet. The two factions were speechless, as they stared in surprise at the young newcomer that appeared out of the blue!

Ye Chong gulped.

That was how Ye Chong was introduced to the elderly group, and one of them eventually came up with the idea of accepting Ye Chong as a member of Aurora. This won the immediate approval from almost everyone, and Ye Chong did not get a chance to say anything before being taken into their fold.

And so, Ye Chong unexpectedly became a member of Aurora.

Ye Chong was not entirely happy with the outcome. He had always thought that he had inherited most of his Papa's skill and knowledge, and was somewhat confident with his expertise in mechanical modifications; but here in Aurora, everyone was at

least a few levels above him, and that was a hard fact to swallow.

Unwilling to lag behind, Ye Chong upped his game and began the long and hard journey of further educating himself.

No matter which field he studied, these old timers had ensured that it was thoroughly explored and well researched, leaving a large gap for him to catch up. Fortunately for Ye Chong, who had a solid foundation in these fields, could absorb and adapt the resources around him like a hungry whirlpool.

In time, Ye Chong's innate talent, impeccable learning skills, and solid foundation were noticed by the other members.

These old men have had their moments of glory, enjoying prestigious reputations in their own expertise, but many of them were without a predecessor of choice, because a good student was hard to come by!

Over time, they grew interested in Ye Chong, as if he was the one they were all waiting for. They welcomed his questions, and let him in on many of their latest findings, further adding to the list of things Ye Chong had to catch up with. However, Ye Chong continued his studies with unhindered curiosity, and this gained the approval of his seniors.

In the end, Ye Chong became Aurora's one and only apprentice, and a shared one at that.

He entered into the hub, and the old timers all came up to him.

"Ah, isn't this our young lad? Haven't seen you in a few days, did you get to understand the formula I taught you last time? You didn't? No matter, we can still look at it from a different perspective, for example –"

The voice was interrupted by another angry one. "You old fool, don't keep annoying our young lad with questions, if you drive him nuts, I'll hold you accountable!" The same voice continued, "Hey young lad, come on here, let me see if you've grown taller.

Oh, still the same old, eh? Nothing to worry about, the human body is only flesh and bones, but it's your character and knowledge that matters most! I have a few papers here that I've been working on these past few years, you can have a look at them when you're free!"

"Huh, old Du, what an ingenious approach! How could I have not thought of that? I should start compiling my own work too!"

The elderly named Du was smiling with delight, exceedingly pleased with himself. Ye Chong, however, stood amongst the elderly, with the info chip from Du in hand, thrown off by the conversational exchanges.

Inside, there was an extravagantly decorated dwelling room.

Jeb's handsome facial features wore a twisted expression, as though a noble and graceful lord had transformed into a horrifying demon.

Damn it, today's loss was completely unexpected. Jeb recalled how his gloating act must seem like a clown's clumsy performance in the eyes of his opponent, and his anger stoked into a flaming rage.

The series of unfortunate events that befell him these past few days had stretched his endurance to the maximum, and Jeb could not take it anymore – he flung his virtual world hyperlink into the intricately patterned carpet, breaking the device into pieces.

Just the thought of the imposter made Jeb see red. How he cursed and cursed the damned bastard.

This is not the end! Definitely not! Jeb howled inaudibly in his mind.

I, the magnificent Jeb, cannot possibly lose to a scum like that. I will make him pay for this, I'll kill him, that's right! I'll kill him! By then, Jeb was far from rational, his eyes bloodshot from his manic state. Jeb could not help but laugh as he imagined his

opponent begging for mercy under his sword.

A few minutes later, Jeb finally cooled down and regained his composure and grace. He grabbed the comms device from the table and imperiously summoned, “Butler Qiu, get over here!”

A professional looking man gave a fist wrapping salute and a slight bow before Jeb – this was his family’s butler, Qiu.

Jeb spoke through gritted teeth, “Butler Qiu, find out everything about the NR Training Center’s pilot registered under the name YC. I want to know everything about him, understand? Everything!”

The butler’s lowered eyes darkened for a moment – whoever this YC is, they must have angered the reckless young master. He knew well enough that his young master was good only in his looks, as he was always uninterested in learning, frequently engaged with idle sport and had the bitter peculiarity of never leaving insults unavenged. Those who offended him never end up well, and many have suffered as a result.

Qiu sighed deeply – someone will suffer again this time!

But superficially, he exaggerated an obedient “Yes, sir,” and accepted his orders with due courtesy, for he would not dare to offend the young master for fear of losing his job. Moreover, the current situation was an opportunity for him, if appropriately handled.

It’s not too hard to please someone like Jeb – simply acting like the perfect servant would keep him happy, unlike dealing with his elder brother, the eldest young master. Qiu suppressed a shiver from thinking about the cunning man and his impenetrable thoughts.

Jeb was satisfied with his butler’s response, for he derived his sense of superiority from those of lower stature. Contented, he waved the butler away with pretentious grace.

Hehehe, you little fool, I'll get to you yet, and let you realize the horrible consequences of offending yours truly!

Jeb tipped his wine glass and sipped on three-centuries-old naturally brewed red wine. He studied the glass intently, his thoughts unknown to anyone, save for himself. The crimson drink glowed softly under the dim lighting, radiating an ominous, bloody aroma that promised certain death.

# Chapter 14: Unravelling Secrets

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Angel evaded the seemingly random traps and the wandering electrically-activated mines very carefully.

Hmph, so what if they're the [MPA](#)? He managed to slip into their internal system after all, as if the place was left unguarded. Angel was secretly pleased with himself.

Today, photon processors offered more and more capabilities for mechs – one could even say that it was the mech's most important component. The MPA may give the impression of consisting mainly of mech pilots, but the association had enlisted a wide range of other experts related to mechs. Amongst the ranks, the Mavericks number quite a few.

While Angel was generally capable, entering the MPA's interior ground was still a feat he was quite proud of.

However, it would not do to be careless here, for dangers lurked around every possible corner, and if his presence alerted the Mavericks who served as guards for the area, escape will be more than difficult!

This was a crucial job – if he succeeded, the pay will be enough to support his spending spree for a good while. Angel knew that there were other Mavericks who received the same offer, and that made him eager to prove himself to be a cut above the rest.

The portal before Angel emitted a bright rainbow colored spectrum; steam escaped through the cracks, as though the portal would lead to a fairyland.

Angel suspiciously eyed the portal. As a Maverick with more than a few years under his belt, Angel came to realize that a dazzling appearance was often a cover for a potentially fatal trap.

Angel bent down to reach for the floor with his right hand, and closed his eyes – and an almost faint ripple spread out from where



he stood.

This was one of Angel's two unique skills, called the Ripple. Every Maverick had their own unique skills, and these skills represent the Maverick's attainment and achievement in their respective fields. Ripple was Angel's – it was used to scan the surroundings without triggering sensors or traps, and could even be undetectable by other Mavericks. The skill was a complementary addition to his trap setting expertise, and his skillset made him an excellent choice for clandestine jobs. Other Mavericks may have attributed his past successes to his excellent intuition on traps and their locations, but it was all a cover for his true skill.

His other unique skill would be Epiphyte – like the eponymous group of organisms, Epiphyte would not harm its target, but once activated, it would cling on tightly to the target till Angel allowed otherwise. It was a very reliable skill, and efficient for tracking. Angel's reputation was largely built on these two skills.

...

Angel focused on the feedback from his Ripple.

One, two... Angel counted silently to eight. Eight tiers! What stroke of luck, to have an eight-tiered security barrier!

Angel did a double take on the situation, sensing something was possibly amiss.

Without absolute certainty, Angel did not dare to make his next move. Instead, he went through his memories meticulously.

That's not right! He finally figured out what gave rise to his uneasiness. On his way in, he would not have avoided all those concealed traps without his Ripple! The MPA's hired Mavericks were good, so it would be illogical for the security barrier to be easier to break than the earlier security measures.

An eight-tiered security barrier may not be simple to hack, but

for a Maverick who could venture this far into the MPA's domain, it would seem like child's play! Angel concluded decisively – there must be some other hidden trick! Right! That must be it.

Angel closed his eyes and activated Ripple again, calmly analyzing the feedback with care.

It took thirty minutes, but Angel finally re-opened his eyes and exhaled slowly in relief.

What astonishing programming! While the barrier appeared to eight-tiered, each tier was connected to the others based on some intricate principles, effectively creating an extra tier of security – which meant, there were actually nine tiers! If one had hacked through the barriers through usual means, it would surely have triggered a trap.

Astounding! What an astounding way of linking between security tiers! His first ever encounter with such mechanism, and he had nearly fell for it! He thanked his lucky stars for being extra careful!

While the security barrier was complex, Angel had managed a good grasp of its inner workings, and felt reasonably confident. However, as he began hacking, a green shadow flashed past his vision, catching him off guard!

What was that? Angel, who was very much surprised, stopped his hacking. The portal before him was still glowing brightly, painting a rainbow hue over his surroundings.

Was the green flicker an illusion? Angel wasn't certain. As he studied his surroundings carefully with the hopes of finding the source of that green flash, the portal's bright, colorful glow greatly inhibited his search. In the end, he found nothing.

Perhaps it was really an illusion? Angel was unsure. If only the portal would stop glowing –

Angel started. That's right, why is the portal glowing? Could it be... Could it be... a means to hide something?"

Angel thought it through and began to see the sense in his reasoning. He avoided making sudden movements, and merely scanned his surroundings.

And there it was! Angel nearly went blind with the searching, but he could now see the dim green flash – it was a thin sliver of green light, concealed by the portal's brighter glow.

It was concealed, even after using his Ripple detection. It was a first for Angel, and he could not help admiring the masterpiece! However, since he had found it, then...

Angel gave the mysterious portal another look – in his eyes, which mirrored a fair maiden's pair, beckoning him with open arms.

Butler Qiu began respectfully, "Second young master, regarding your orders last time, there have been some developments!"

Jeb was overjoyed. "Really? Where's he from? His real name? Haha, he will not get away this time!" He sobered, and continued ruthlessly. "Hehe, your offense against me has doomed you!"

Qiu had more to say, but was obviously hesitant.

Jeb noticed and frowned, displeased. "Come on, just spill it! Could it be that he is from a family of high standing?"

The butler bowed a little. "That's not it, it's just that... Well..."

Jeb grew impatient. "Just tell it as it is, none of this nonsense!"

Qiu grew nervous. "Young master, after you ordered for this information, I had hired a few capable Mavericks to investigate. While the training center's security was commendable, they still managed to bypass it and access and information archives. It's just that... It's just that, the whole thing looks suspicious!"

"Suspicious?" Jeb inquired.

Qiu grew increasingly edgy, as he knew that the second young master before him was quite temperamental. With the current

delicate balance within the family, he must always be on his guard, for any error on his part would have disastrous consequences. If the matter at hand was not satisfyingly handled, the second young master might throw a tantrum, and that would spell punishment, or even his expulsion from the Luo Family. Qiu, who was careful in nature, dreaded the possibilities ahead.

He replied shortly, “Yes, in the information archives, we searched through all of the ID’s, but could not find this YC character, not even one with a similar name.”

Jeb was stunned. “Not even one? That’s impossible! I saw it, clear as day! It must be right!”

Qiu maneuvered through the conversation smoothly. “Of course, this servant believes in the young master’s sharp eyes, you could not have possibly seen it wrong!” Seeing Jeb preening as expected, he continued, “But that’s what’s so suspicious about this, why would there be no records of him in the archives? Access to the virtual world requires identification of some sort, it would have been impossible otherwise!”

Jeb began to realize the situation clearly. “That’s it, this is impossible!”

Qiu continued, “This servant was thinking, perhaps YC is a Maverick too?”

Jeb beamed and followed his logic. “That’s right! Hah! That must be it! Only Mavericks could do something like this!”

Mavericks were people who could bypass limitations set in the virtual world through their skills in using photon processors. They were talented specialists of these processors, and so had an unimaginable advantage over the average person in the virtual world.

Qiu continued, “And so this servant thought, one would need to fight fire with fire. This servant has entrusted a few Mavericks

associated with the Luo family to investigate his background!”

Jeb prodded impatiently. “And what have you found about his background?”

The butler’s expression grew even stranger.

MPA stands for Mech Pilot’s Association.

# Chapter 15: Mavericks

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Angel was disturbed.

The last mission went perfectly well, considering that out of the five Mavericks that were sent, he alone managed to deliver, while the others failed with the final portal. Just the thought of solving that remarkable trap brightened Angel's mood, and the edges of his mouth lifted a little.

The mission was, honestly, quite a challenge, but Angel found the reward too high to resist. Such a high pay; besides, this was not the first time he served the Luo family, and they had been reliable clients. Most importantly, the job was practically made for someone like him.

The Luo family was interested in someone, and with such a lucrative reward, Angel could only imagine the person to be someone of high standing, or a skillful mech pilot they might be considering to hire. While he had a few good guesses, nothing prepared him for the truth.

There were no records whatsoever on the so-called YC character in the information archive. If he had not copied some of the records to show the Luo family, they might not even believe that he made it into the system!

When Angel accepted the fact that the archives had nothing on YC, he felt a sense of fear.

What if YC was also a Maverick?

The thought had haunted Angel ever since the mission.

While Mavericks were just like any other person in the real world, they became obvious outcasts in the virtual world. Here, they were not bound by the same rules that govern the average user; instead, they were powerful, and in the eyes of others, almost invincible.

But was that indeed so?

Angel smiled ironically as he thought of those rumors. There were many unwritten rules for Mavericks, placing a huge restriction on most of them. This was even more so for independent Mavericks who had no specific allegiance, and Angel was one such Maverick.

One of the rules that Angel observed strictly was to avoid taking on missions that involve other Mavericks.

There was no real way to compare the strength between Mavericks, as each had their own field of specialty. Even within the same field, a beginner with remarkable ingenuity might best an experienced opponent. After all, creativity could work miracles.

Angel was not interested in battles between Mavericks. Usually, a user is hyperlinked to the virtual world via electromagnetic wave stimulation of neural signals in the brain, which creates a resonance between the brainwaves and the virtual world. While hacking into the hyperlink device proves difficult, it was not entirely impossible.

Angel once witnessed a rival pair of exceptional Mavericks engage in a fierce battle, and it ended with the loser braindead. This was the first time he realized the extent of a Maverick's capabilities and the harshness of the virtual world.

Fortunately, Mavericks who could push past this final barrier were few and far between, and represented the cream of the crop. Most of them understood the weight of their powers and would not use them carelessly. They even took the extra step of binding each other to a set of rules far stricter than for the average Maverick to curb atrocities in the virtual world.

Never offend a Maverick, however weak one may seem to be.

Perusing the facilities of the NR Training Centre without proper registration did not seem like the acts of a lesser Maverick, if he or

she was indeed one.

Angel felt fear spreading deep within, for he dreaded enraging another Maverick, and possibly one that was much stronger than him.

But the matter was not over.

The Luo Family had entrusted him with another mission – to find out YC's true history. It could be anything, like an address, or a name. The mission came with the expected extravagant price tag offered by his client.

All things said, Angel felt that he should not refuse the offer. The Luo family had been his main client, and they had gotten familiar with each other. Besides, this offer was similarly suitable for a Maverick of his skill, and the return was more than acceptable – it was the highest price he had ever been offered.

But Angel was still hesitant.

What if the opponent was in fact the most powerful Maverick?

Angel knew himself very well – he was like a mole, quick to identify hidden traps, but disadvantaged in a direct encounter. If this YC character was a Maverick, he would have to prepare for the possibility of being a target of revenge.

If the last mission was a small offense, this mission would cross the line. The greatest fear of a Maverick was to have one's real identity exposed. In the real world, a Maverick is as vulnerable as anyone else – without the ability to defend oneself, losing anonymity would inevitably lead to losing one's freedom, and possibly, one's life.

Angel dared not accept the current mission lightly. His mind was still clear, not too affected by the Luo family's excessiveness. He understood that accepting it might lead to a struggle with a powerful Maverick that would only end with death, or even a joint attack by other Mavericks, considering the fact that what he was



about to do was a huge taboo for their kind!

But still he could not decide, the sky-high financial reward was very, very persuasive – just this one mission would support him comfortably for the next decade. Angel had a 70% confidence level of doing what needed to be done without the target noticing, for his Epiphyte had never failed him before.

“This mission is really giving me a headache.” Angel sighed as he massaged his temples. He should refuse it, but the money, the temptation! He should accept it, but what if he could not live long enough to enjoy his reward?

Suddenly, Angel had an epiphany – why not meet this YC character and assess his mettle before deciding?

Based on intel from the Luo family, Angel arrived at the NR Training Center, disguised as a tourist.

Once there, he found his target shortly – YC.

YC seemed to be just finished with a battle, heading outwards with his mech. Angel began to trail him, interested to know who this YC actually was.

Amongst the passersby, YC seemed to blend in.

Suddenly, Angel noticed something, and did a double take!

Mavericks!

The people who just passed by YC, they were all Mavericks! Angel could feel the cogwheels in his head turning – it must be that some other Mavericks had accepted the job! The Luo family had always preferred to hire a few Mavericks for tougher missions. Based on the aura of those few, they certainly must be!

Are they planning to do something here and now?

Angel decided to stay aside and observe. After all, he should take the opportunity of investigating YC without getting personally involved.

Angel focused silently, and his Ripple began to spread outwards, informing him of all the details of his surroundings in great clarity.

Well done! They're indeed masters of their trade, picking the perfect opening, and moving almost imperceptibly in the background. Angel felt great admiration towards these Mavericks! They were experts, and worked together seamlessly like second nature – the sight was one to behold!

But what happened next made Angel's blood froze – that moment was one that would stick with him forever!

# Chapter 16: Abyssal Rule

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Ye Chong exited the battlefield on his knees in exhaustion. Man that was one annoying guy! Are there even cubs in the jungle? Why was everyone on the list prepared by Mu felt like they were on steroids or something? They were so tough that one couldn't win without losing a tooth or two. While Ye Chong was consumed in his thoughts of his battle, something was brewing.

“Ye! Look out!” Mu Shang’s voice rang in Ye Chong’s head, like a bell. “What is it?!” He looked around, tensed. “There are four Mavericks identified nearby! One located at the corner, identity unknown.” A hologram of an overview of the area appeared before Ye Chong with locations of the unknown individuals marked by Mu Shang

“Mavericks? What is that?” Ye Chong questioned in curiosity.

“Currently it is not possible to make a clear and concise explanation here. We will talk about this when we get back. We are not aware of their intentions too!” Stealthily, the Mavericks surrounded Ye Chong. He could not tell if they did it intentionally or not and as he lifted his leg slowly stepping to the right, they moved in sync as well; maintaining a circular orbit around him. Ye Chong’s brows furrowed and sighed in frustration as he put his fingers down on the control panel, ready to launch an attack anytime, “Ye! We are under attack! Do we strike back?” beeped Mu Shang.

Even though Ye Chong could not see Mu Shang from the cabin, he still rolled his eyes and snorted, “Duh! Of course we are striking back! What else are we going to do? Even rats would counterattack with their fangs, so are we waiting here to rot away with time?”

“Oh.” Mu Shang flatly responded, “I see.”

...

Angel's eyes glistened in anticipation, scrutinizing every detail surrounding her. Waves crashing in a unique rhythm; Angel's acute sense of sight picks up surrounding features such as the needle on clock at the lobby that struck at a quarter past nine and 32 seconds.

Oblivious of what was happening, YC made no moves since he was not able to sense any apparent danger. On the other hand, an expert with keen eyes like Angel was aware of the situation YC was in; it was evident that the Mavericks had placed a surge seeker on YC. It only needed a few seconds for the device to link with the system of the target and by then it would be too late for them to discover and eliminate it. Everyone in the galaxy would have access to YC's database! The only effective way to tackle the surge seeker is to avoid it but as soon as it is attached on you, the fun begins!

The debate here would be; could YC be just another commoner?

Angel scoffed in disgust at a ridiculous pay by the Luo family to effortlessly wipe out a commoner like YC. Tension rumbled at the pit of Angel's stomach with regret. While he could have finish YC off with a few strikes and receive that handsome pay, he decided to monitor the victim from afar. He was certain that even his bone eater would outperform the outdated surge seeker easily. Just when Angel started to drown in remorse, the situation changed dramatically on the battlefield!

A screeching cry can be heard that brings chill down your spine. Angel's lips were moving inarticulately but no words could be heard. A formless pressure crushed Angel; his body was locked and stuck as if imprisoned in a grip by an invisible hand. No limbs can be moved except for his befuddled thoughts! Angel could not budge as all eyes were fixed on YC.

Time seemed to have frozen in place like a three-dimensional projected hologram, a one-of-a-kind disturbing stillness. Angel struggled as he choked out words but failed as the space had turned

into a vacuum with no medium but dead silence. Angel's pupils filled with the deepest fear; his mind thrashing like dark vines creeping up all over one's body.

YC made no further moves, other than a cold stare plastered on his face.

Angel's heart felt colder than an iceberg and a snowfield! He panicked as realization sunk into him that YC was looking right into his soul; he moaned internally at his awaited doom. YC's stare impaled the heart like a glacial spike, breaking through the fragile sense of security, obliterating all hopes in sheer coldness. Angel closed his eyes as he begged for mercy. Please!

In a blink of an eye, the field changed again!

A black hole was formed as it swallowed YC into an abyss that could bring forth the darkest fear of any individuals. Slowly, it engulfed everything nearby. Soon, Angel too was mercilessly sucked in by this dark force. The eyes detected nothing but darkness as Angel lost consciousness.

...

Angel gently peeled open his eyes.

He sat up thunderstruck by the encounter just awhile ago. It felt like it was a dream that only lasted a brief second and he's back to reality. Was the abyss part of the dream or was it something else? Angel questioned but dared not figure it out.

He glanced at the clock; a quarter past nine 35 seconds! It has only been 3 seconds?!

Recollecting the sequence of events, YC had already vanished into thin air but it was only 3 seconds and he had already escaped. Angel was absolutely sure that YC was there. There was no way a man could run that fast!

Angel walked away and instantaneously he saw the four mavericks from before who had been there in the same posture

and position much like a sculpture.

Something was not right, Angel held his steps as the waves wavered in his hands spread between them, but no anomaly was found. After a few hours, the mavericks still remained as sculpture-like; no words were uttered while a passerby was amazed by such lively looking sculptures in the area. Angel wanted to have a closer look so he blended in with the pedestrians and walked towards the sculptures.

Pale and lifeless. Those were the words Angel thought upon seeing their faces. A frantic sharp ringing in his head made Angel anxious.

A face of such kind was not new to him. This is the second time he had experienced this particular symptom. The first time was during the aftermath of two defeated ultimate mavericks in a battle; their souls were completely drained due to brain neural damage. It was the exact kind of face he saw!

He shuddered and trembled in fear, feeling the chills up his spine as he choked on his saliva; the drought in his throat froze his movements.

It... It .... It was not a dream....

Ever-expanding black hole, constant coldness, deafening silence; everything came crashing down and circulating through his mind as he picked up the pieces. The feeling was disturbing and frightening. Angel could not endure it any longer as he let out a shriek and disconnected right after.

...

“So...”

“Mu, what is this maverick you had been mumbling about? How is it that I had never heard of it?”

“Mavericks are the experts in utilizing processors at the virtual world with special abilities. They are known as the ones in the gray

area for they stand between life and death, the black and white, could be both benign and malignant. Hence, the name. Mavericks denote the field they hold expertise in so much it felt like a walk in the park.”

Ye Chong had lost his interests at the mention of processors. “Eh, is it? I don’t really care about some processor professor in the field, so what happened to them anyway?”

“Permanent neurological brain damage.”

“Permanent neurological... what? What do you mean?”

“It’s the state that would eventually lead to either death or dementia.”

Ye Chong raised his brows, “Oh, very well. Then they will be obedient as ever!” At Trash Planet-12, if a man showed mercy to his enemies, he would be as good as the skeletons on the floor. He would be nothing more than bones on the ground. Ye Chong had already gotten used to a life of fight or perish so death was nothing new to him!

“Oh wait!” He turned to Mu Shang.

“Isn’t there another guy in the corner?”

# Chapter 17: That YC Guy

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Mu Shang sneered, “You’ll know by then.”

This fight was no other than a walk in the park; like a stone skimming across the water, one ripple after another with no huge impact. On a more important note, Ye Chong had fallen in love with the life he had gotten which was filled with entertainment and adventure. He had never felt so accomplished before! It was like he was born ready to battle with various classes of people with different mechs. The contentment of his life made him giddy with excitement.

Ye Chong would head to the streets of Gudista for a stroll and talk to the elders there to pass his free time. Besides that, he would also carry on with his ever-changing courses of training after he has finished his virtual world punching session on a daily basis. Compared to the days occupied by scavenging for food and defeating mutants on Trash Planet-12, the current way of life is more fitting for an active and healthy teenager like Ye Chong.

As for the trainings on the list Mu gave, he had already crossed out more than half of them by now!

Ye Chong never knew how prominent his image was throughout the galaxy for a hermit he once was. YC the fighter, who never rest on his laurels, had defeated one opponent after another. It had become the talk of the town among the NR trainees at the FMPA ever since his glorious battle with the Shield of Thorns.

Shield of Thorns was known as the one whom piloted mech “Lorcupine” which was ranked at 82 in the FMPA offensive forces; notorious for possessing both skills and strength, and had gained tons of fans with his distinctive style of fighting. The battle ring was always flooded with spectators if he was in the battlefield.

A man so great was in the end defeated by Ye Chong with a final blow to the head.



Despite the impressive triumph, everyone thought there was nothing extraordinary about the battle. Any individual would have to face defeat one day with no exceptions to the top fighter in EMPA, the Son of Light, who averagely gets knocked out around 10 times a year. Therefore, the Shield of Thorns must have some breaks in his consecutive victories.

What was astounding was the fact that Ye Chong's mech was only a Lacherl.

Lacherl, namely the soldier major is a humanoid mech with low specification and built with a sturdy shell; providing an astronomical defense compared to other mechs of the same level. Additionally, it also has a mediocre or even unbearable speed and mobility, inferring it to be more of a threatening defensive niche in the field. It was especially threatening when the high speed ranged shooting technique became a trend among the fighters; which just happened to be the biggest counter towards its guard, thus killing the population of Lacherl users close to extinction.

Spectators booed at Ye Chong continuously upon seeing him maneuvering a Lacherl into the battlefield. Lordcupine, categorized under OU (Overused) for its premium quality and high ranking in offensive forces would have crashed this wall easily in one blow.

Ye Chong found such expertise absolutely unnecessary and tediously lengthy in mastering the skills. It was too complex for a mere child who had never been through much like him to understand. But frankly speaking, he likes the Lacherl because not only was she the first humanoid model he piloted in the training field, she also looked quite similar to Winnie; in spite of her weight, she moves considerably faster than good old Winnie.

A premium model dueling with a novice model can be compared to an armored warrior fighting a naked farmer.

Nothing much can be expected from the result seeing that there

would be no dramatic twist or the what-ifs. The spectators watched in agreement that the Shield of Thorns' effortless victory would be justifiable from the model of Ye Chong's mech. It was a wrong model to begin with but the unforeseen circumstances before the audiences had them gawping in awe and surprise.

Lacherl swoops down and struck its opponent. It took the Shield of Thorns by surprise as he sneers in discontentment. How badly does she want to taste death? Spectators booed in disbelief at YC, a hero of the zeroes. Suddenly, the room was filled with silence as everyone stared at next spectacle with wide eyes.

Judging from their reactions, everyone had the same thought; how does a heavy machine like Lacherl move this fast?

Jaws dropped as they continued to observe the battle. Lacherl circled Lorcupine swiftly and every swing of the sword confused the Shield of Thorns. At times when he thought to have gotten the sequence of the attack, Lacherl managed to pull a different trick. In the end, he failed to even land an attack on the highness, Lacherl.

Lorcupine was dazed in confusion; he was the one who owned a premium mech but was struck down by a novice mech. It dawned on him that the Lacherl looks different as if it was upgraded into a brand new model.

Could it be that the Lacherl have been modified? Did he replace the engine? How could Lorcupine not land a single strike even if Lacherl was modified with marvelous craftsman skills? Are you freaking kidding me?!

Thoughts raced through his mind in frustration.

Still, that was the reality even if it was unbelievable. The Lacherl piloted by Ye Chong had the upper-hand throughout the fight. However, Shield of Thorns was not a weak one either; he is well-rounded in offensiveness and defensiveness. He is like a sword as good as it's a shield, the traditional combination worked wonders

in his hands, with various kinds of defense techniques – blocking, cancelling, grinding and breaking. Holding up against Lacherl impeccably with the occasional glow of his sword coming from his sequence of defense, a prime manifestation of Lord Porcupine himself; in the shield of the thorns, one prick and you'll pay for it.

Ye Chong was ignorant as he did not produce the opportunity for a strike back and he calmly carried on his inputs.

Such a rare scene indeed! The fight was so overwhelming it had everyone on the edge of their seats amazed by the tension of the battle. They immediately whipped out their hologram recorders to capture this precious fight. Right after the fight ended, the scenes were posted into a discussion forum which attracted enough attention to be crowned as the top news on the site.

Fans had gone through the visuals and were astounded by the skillfulness of YC as they all agreed from their discovery that the Lacherl was an original, unmodified model and that her speed was already at its maximum. The difference was however, YC piloted her in a fair set of movement with sharp turning points rapidly done between each step and by the time Mr. Shield of Thorns could land an attack, YC would have placed her at a safer point; an illusion created that the Lacherl outsped the Lorcupine.

In addition, the heftiness of Lacherl was an advantage YC utilized. According to the analysis based on the visuals, the direction of the sword was aligned with the direction of impulse from Lacherl herself in every strike. To put it simply, every attack made had an enormous amount of kinetic energy under the highest speed of the mech, making Lacherl into a killer machine; brandishing to land a strike. Without a doubt, Lacherl was an intimidating opponent.

Regardless of the mech's model, be it a fighting type or the shooting type, the core would always be the speed of control. When the speed of mech is high, maintaining the accuracy of inputs would have been highly difficult even with the aid of a

powerful processor. Technically, when the mech reaches a velocity that passes the highest capacity by more than 70%, the struggle to maintain an accurate input would steeply increase. While YC broke the speed cap and was still able to glide like a bird, the other pilots who were watching couldn't help but to salute him out of deep respect.

To think that those outcomes of the investigation were already astonishing, there's more. One attentive pilot calculated YC's movements; in 3 seconds, within a distance of mere 100 meters, YC had already executed sharp low-angled turnings eight times! When the results were posted on the site, the pressure was exerted and the anxiety brewed!

Such technique was called the Low Angled Turning, the most practical and yet the most challenging technique to perform by the speedy models. Well, almost all pilots knew the trick but it was still the hardest one to play out. The sharp turnings while traveling at maximum speed would constantly bring discomfort to the pilot's body which would heighten as the speed increases.

Eight continuous Low Angled Turnings in three seconds was a baffling accomplishment. It was almost as if YC was a mutated ape from another galaxy.

The community thought that it was preposterous and started doubting if the calculation was done correctly or not. The network was a virtual reality. If he couldn't do it outside the virtual world, he could never do it here. The system would have prompted him about 'system failure' right away!

Questions filled the air about a man achieving the unachievable. Could a mortal's body be this durable?

Anyone that knew about the mysterious YC started to monitor him as fans awaited more mind-boggling matches to test the limits of their hearts.

# Chapter 18: Turn in Events

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YC is like a never-ending cave of treasure where one will not see the end because there's always a new trick up his sleeves that constantly caught everyone by surprise.

Skills ranged from the Thomas' Spin to the Wavy Step were classic moves that were like bread and butter to the pilots. As fundamental as they were, the skills became something that was extraordinary when executed by YC at the same time deadly as well. Moreover, his emergence shattered the dogma of how advanced techniques would win them all, and the superstitions of how a premium mech would determine victory in the general public. The trends have evolved into a new era where basic moves were in the spotlight once again.

There were even some who identified and compiled every set of moves used by YC in the visuals available as new references in the textbooks.

Not once did YC ever comment about his reputation. He had unfailingly challenged three pilots a day and vanished right after. No one could tell who he was and no one would know where he came from. He would always remain a mystery among the community which had initiated a cult of his fandom; those that crazed for his appearance and craved for his flaunt of skills.

Contrary to the habits of the pilots, YC had never operated only one particular kind of mech. Instead, he changed them regularly and all of them also happened to be the pre-made models. Pre-made models were more of the majority than modified models in the field. These models were mostly used of commoners like YC due to the fact that they could not afford to modify their mechs which would cost them a fortune. Plus, these standard models have stark disadvantages compared to the modified models but despite that, YC brought life into them. Every single ounce of the mechs' capacity had been utilized, their wills were resuscitated and the

continuous episode of the weak surpassing the strong replayed on the battlefield.

Whenever YC piloted a different type of mech, a brand new variation of strategies would get showcased and it would be beyond everyone else's imagination! The ending of his moves could hardly be predicted like the master among the experts, every input was under his control and anything under his vicinity could be killing weaponry. Once the champion fighter, the Son of Light commented, "If he were to pilot a mech of the same level as mine, I'm not even sure whether I could take him down!"

The visuals of YC's battles were the hottest items in the virtual world.

YC could be seen as rather impulsive fighter to the other world, but he could not care less. Ye Chong was not concerned about whoever that sang for his victories and thirsted for his fights; his life would not be altered by them. The battles that he partook up until now was to sharpen his ability and to improvise the chance of survival on this dying planet of trash.

Without a doubt his mentor Mu Shang was amazed. "Hmm, this is a good trick. You could think about keeping it." Mu Shang praised as he watched Ye Chong performed a Low Angled Turning.

Later in the days, Ye Chong had a new daily task at hand which is to pilot Mu Shang! Wow, Mu actually pulled off a significant low angled turning about 20 times in three seconds! That is scary! Ye Chong mumbled to himself.

The first ride ended up as quite a horrifying experience to Ye Chong. He had to drag his feet out of the cabin with his face drained of color and his legs trembled. Before he could even utter a word, he threw up drastically and was forced to take a break for the next few days despite having a strong physique.

"Dammit Mu! How could you do this to me! You actually shut down the cabin pressure buffering system?" Ye Chong muttered in

complain as he flopped on the bed while shooting a glare at Mu who was smirking at the side. Hmph!

“The side effect does not seem too bad. Hmmm, we could still increase intensity!” Ye Chong was exasperated but with a final blow, he was knocked out!

Mu was definitely not joking around and as expected, he really did raise the intensity by turning it up a notch!

Fortunately, Ye Chong too was not a typical fighter. With buffed up muscles like a mutated ape, he made it through the first few days of piloting Mu and as time passed, such training had become the easiest part of his day.

...

Jeb shrieked, “What?! We had lost contact?”

Butler Chew responded, “Yes! I too have not the slightest idea on what’s going on, but we had indeed lost contact with the four mavericks we sent. They seemed to have disappeared... I suspect...”

“What do you suspect?”

Butler Chew glanced at his master, “I sus...suspect.. they could be in grave danger!”

“Grave danger? What do you mean?”

“I had heard from Sir Luo that the mavericks hold the ability to disrupt the neurological system of a man’s brain through the network of the virtual world, given they were strong enough... I speculated... were these happened to be...”

“For real?!” Jeb was fuming in disbelief. “Why does a man like me have never heard of such story? Are you pulling my legs?”

“No sire. There’s no way I would dare to offend your greatness.” The butler quickly begged for forgiveness, “I shall fulfill all the orders by your greatness, whatever it take, on my own. I would

and only would do it by myself. If it's for your greatness, how would I dare to be negligent and let others take over?"

"Of course you wouldn't dare!" Jeb snorted. He hesitated for a moment, "Is this the end of the whole episode?" Jeb knew very well ever since he was born into a big family like this about the dangers of making enemies in the field; especially those who lurk in darkness whom he couldn't see.

Butler Chew exhaled in relief knowing that he would be the last one to die even in the worst case scenario. "Master is such a decisive and forgiving leader!" At the same time, he did not forget to butter up to Jeb. Jeb snickered at his compliment and felt overjoyed.

It has been three days since Angel had vaporized from the virtual world!

Day by day he feared and regretted of what he had done and wondered why he would be so impulsive as to accept that foolish request! The nightmare haunted him like a skeleton in the closet, clouding his mind.

He was furious! For a maverick like him, being forbidden to go on virtual web was like a bird losing its wings to fly! Regardless, he dared not oppose his own will; if virtual web was his wings, he would rather not to lose his life over it. For three days he curled up in the gloomy cottage, feeling a little insecure.

The fifth day came and the former glory gleam on his face was long gone. Now, all that was left were the horrors which prevailed from the torture he had been through.

On the eighth day, he snapped!

His wrinkled hands reached out to the helmet at the corner. If he were to die, an instant death was always better than suffering in pain.

Well, what am I even thinking? Maybe the guy didn't even



recognize me at all. I'm just overthinking. Why would he care!?

His fingers gently caressed the round surface of the helmet. The expression plastered on his face was like one in a trance as he thought to himself; to go or not to go? The decisions drummed in his head. He still could not come to a decision.

At last, biting his teeth, he put on his helmet and logged in!

He became calm as he stood in a moving crowd and looked upon the virtual world.

He walked for few hours yet nothing had happened but a wave of relief washed over him. Apparently, it was indeed him overthinking things.

Tranquility started filling his heart as he began to hum and strolled towards a gathering spot for mavericks to get some info because there were still doubts that nagged in him.

Who was this YC? I had never heard of a maverick of such kind? He queried and would absolutely like to find out more about this guy.

And out of a sudden, the world shook!

# Chapter 19: Sudden Attack

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The ground shook and Angel felt sunken, as he was pulled beyond his own weight. He could barely react in time as he lost control of his body. It might be happening in the virtual world yet his body was soaked with cold sweat. A mystical voice boomed into his ears, “You have finally come! I have waited long enough!”

Angel replied in a trembled voice, “Who... Who are you?” He acted frankly, for it was perhaps the last day or the last moment of his life. The reason being that he would really want to know the identity of this man among the Mavericks, not with vengeance, but with admiration. YC had earned his respect during the battle before for his outstanding performance in any aspect of the field that Angel could not compete. Like an alpine mountain in his career, steep and craggy, YC became the idol in his mind. If he were to be dead afterwards, due to YC, Angel would be fine and have no complaint with that fact. He was prepared for the consequences, knowing the fact that YC could have been a member of the Mavericks all this while.

Angel froze alone in a distorted posture in place. There wasn't anybody around.

A fading voice flashed before him, “Keke, haven't you done your research? How could you still not know who I am?” The question had Angel pale and frightened, “I know I am impotent to you. But why the trickery? It's not funny.”

... A moment of silence struck the place.

The voice lingered apologetically, “I'm sorry for what I've done just now!” And it dramatically turned into a blood-thirsty voice, “But I know. You are certain of why I am here. Aren't you?”

Angel shuddered. I knew it! What's coming to him would arrive in the end. Well, there wouldn't be a need for him to keep hiding anymore. Angel then confessed everything, from how he got his

deal, to how he hacked into the core of the training ground, without holding back.

He was ready for death as he closed his eyes, with his mouth shut tightly immediately after the confession.

...

... He awaited his death, but nothing occurred. And by the time he had realized it, his body regained its mobility.

“If you want to kill me, just do it already!”

His shaking voice trailed off in the street where a few pedestrians had their eyes fixed on Angel in deep pity, as if seeing an idiot in his own melodrama.

Did he... let go of me... for real? He was in disbelief. He tried lifting himself up from his feet. The unforgettable voice from the previous oblivion was not ringing in his ears anymore. Angel, who held back his flooding tears, slammed the logout button at light speed!

At Luo's Research Center.

The manager rested in his cozy armchair, setting his eyes upon the view of the outside world through the highly transparent glass window. He watched the people below hurry by, as a feeling of serenity surged through his body, for he knew that this very research institute is the heart of the Luo family and is significant to what kept their family going strong. Due to Luo's authority, the existence of this institute had been safely protected in secret. The strength of this research center! It would be among the first few in the entire Fal galaxy. The lord of this family entrusted him with this center. What faith in his capability! He had thought so, as he snickered. An outsider earning this much of trust from the lord, this is more than a mere achievement.

But well, I heard there was a dispute between the young master and the lord... wonder if it's true... Sigh... every family has their

own difficulty, not even the great lord, wise and decisive, could prevent this. Still, this was very strange. The young master had always been known for his gentle and humble nature, a genuine man, and a likeable character to the lord. Then why the dispute? Almost everyone in the house presumed the young master was to be the successor to the Luo family, even the lord himself claimed in a few occasions that the young master could take his legacy and become the next prominent figure in the family. Does that mean he is now keener towards the younger master? It couldn't be! That young man only knew how to spend his rotten life wallowing in his gambling and prostitution! There was not once he caused problem without raising the name of the Luo family. Oh, all the nonsense he had done! The people hate him! Even the lord hates him to the bone! The lord couldn't have been this dim-witted, could he?

The fiasco panicked everyone under the roof. There hadn't been good news coming from the authority and nobody wanted to know the details, for it would cost their head if they knew about it!

His pondering was interrupted by the alarm that came wailing.

Luo Renhuo jumped up from his chair and rushed to the lobby, upholding his nature of responsibility, always being in the frontline, as complimented by his lord.

The institute had descended into chaos. The researchers scurried around in fear.

He scowled and shouted, "What's with the panic! Everyone, get back into your positions! Mo Lianfu, what's going on?" His steadiness influenced the men and the situation became under control. His reputation among the men had pacified the institute!

A slender man quickly reported, "Manager, we have been attacked! Our processor was damaged and we have lost control! What should we do? We are doomed at this rate!"

"Lost control?" His head was bombarded by bewilderment for a while, with his eyes reflecting the horrified look of Mo Lianfu

awaiting for further commands.

Luo Ren was finally conscious, surely he could not go wrong at this stage, if not, everything else would go wrong!

They sprinted to the processor control room, where the usually empty room was crowded by people by then. None of the crowd were tranquil.

An aged researcher waved at them.

“Elder Mo, how’s the situation? Could we retrieve control?” Manager’s tone was somber, but he tried maintaining respect towards Elder Mo, for he was Mo Lianfu’s grandfather, who also happened to be the senior researcher in the institute. Even the lord would address him as Elder Mo.

Elder Mo shook his head, “It’s really, really bad. The attacker might have been a Maverick, who snuck in stealthily into our institute. Ohh... how could we have not notice! The shame!” Elder Mo felt sorry for his helplessness.

“Is there really no way to resolve this?” Manager Luo nervously asked.

Elder Mo pointed his fingers towards ten men in helmets, “Well we would have to depend on them. They are the experts among the Mavericks we could find, hopefully they could at least trace the attacker in the virtual network.” He pondered, “It would be best if you inform the lord right away and call for aid!”

Manager Luo went to connect with the communicator on the spot, as the research institute held great significance, all the reporting goes to the master, directly!

Connection failed. Connection failed. Connection failed. He tried connecting for sometime but all of them failed. The manager’s face further drained. An intuition pulsed within him that something bad had happened. What if the lord was attacked too? His heart skipped a beat. This is a planned attack! Everything was well

chained and well guarded! And they could only passively stay. Who in the world is this brilliant attacker?

He whispered, “Elder Mo, stay here and watch over everybody. I’ll go get backup from the lord.” And he jumped right through the window.

Wait! This is the 80th floor of the building! Manager!

As he fell freely in the air, his right pointing finger and middle finger fondled the mech warping button and in an instant, a blazing red humanoid mech appeared before him. He grabbed the right arm swiftly and slid into the cabin.

All engines on! Full speed due northwest!

## Chapter 20: Aftermath

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When Manager Luo made his arrival at Luo's HQ, he finally realized how serious the situation had turned out.

The Luos suffered immense loss this time! It is beyond calculation! When he saw the lord, he couldn't believe his eyes. The sulky man in his elderly was the wisest leader of the family for the past 200 years. The confidence, grace and exerting pride were no longer seen by then. The lord before him was merely an elder in despair. There wasn't much for him to do anymore, thus the manager backed away.

This time, the resultant attack caused an estimated loss that everyone in the house feared. A fatal blow in the record of the Luo's reign. If it wasn't for the young master who took over the place straightaway after the raid, the chaos would not have ended just yet.

The raid's source was inferred to have come from the virtual world as all units that made direct connection to the virtual world were involved in the attack. Moreover though, in this raid the attacker had also applied indirect attacks with external forces, meaning the inputs were too from the network. After some analysis made by Luo's own technicians, these attacks were believed to be done singlehandedly. That means, there could only be one man on the other side!

If it's so, it would be terrorizing! One man? One man who could perform such detailed planning with such complicated calculation, instantaneously on all units? Does he have shadow partners or something? At this point, everyone showed disbelief.

The attacker did not leave any form of trail, not even his input calculations. Statistics depicted that right at the first moment of the attack, there had already been 89 Mavericks and more than 200 technicians at an attempt to stop the coming attack in the virtual

network. The figure showed a steep increase to 152 mavericks and about 400 technicians online. The manpower of the Luo's was so powerful, even the Ji family, the expert of the experts for the processor that would not be easy to take on, yet they failed to even identify the attacker. The attack could not be stopped. They could only watch everything that was happening before them.

Who is this attacker? Why is he attacking the Luo? Revenge? Anger? Other kinds of motive? The questions puzzled the young master who had just taken over. Luo Heng was disturbed. If he could not find out who the attacker was, then he would have to bear the upcoming attacks unknowingly. This is really bad for the family! This would be equivalent to being choked by the attacker as all the business running under the institute had connections with the virtual world!

People around speculated that this could be done purposely by other competing families in Fal, as it seemed they could be the only suspects. But only Luo Heng was well aware that it could never be them. The 4 major families that held the veins of technological development in Fal, the Luo, the Yuan, the Gu and the Ji families. They all shared similar strengths. Even if the second strongest Ji families could not have wounded the Luo this hard. Plus, the connections between the families were more than just complications. There had been various occasions where they had cross-family marriages, balancing out the mutuality among them carefully. He believed that such kind of attack would not benefit any of them in the long run and none of the family would be this short-sighted.

Out of the blue, the communicator buzzed on the desk.

He knotted his brows briefly. Haven't I told them that I do not want to be disturbed at the moment?

He pressed the accept button, a partially translucent interface showed up before him. Oddly enough, there wasn't anything on the screen and a dubious voice came from the other side,



“Greetings. It was such a pity that I could not appear to celebrate this occasion. Oh, I almost forgot! Congratulations on becoming the successor of the family!”

You have finally showed up huh! Luo Heng almost could not hold his agitation, “Who are you! And why are you attacking the Luo! What has the Luo family done to you?”

The voice replied teasingly, “Well for that, you have to ask your own brother! To avoid any unnecessary inconvenience, I decided to demonstrate a little bit of my capability, just enough to warn you all!”

Jeb! Luo Heng roared in his heart, “Very well then, how would you like to end this?” Luo Heng acknowledged the difference between them, thus he put them aside inferiorly.

The person tittered in the communicator, “I’ve already said, this is merely a forewarning. If you all could leave me alone, perhaps I could save some more time and not waste it on things like this! So, my recommendation would be, you all should abort any kinds of actions against me. Of course, this is only my two-cents. If you have confidence in your men, you could just disregard it and let it slip by like a winter breeze. But, you better be prepared for my next attack!”

What a blatant threat! Dammit! The young master cursed in his mind, but there’s nothing else better than this for things to end. The Luo currently needed time more than anything else, to rebuild forces. He weakly responded, “Are you sincere in your words?”

“Certainly. Honesty is always my virtue!”

“Alright then! We have a deal!”

A knock on the door resounded from the other side of the room,

“Hmm, looks like it is time for me to leave. Good bye!” The screen darkened as the call was hung up.

“Come in!”

His assistance walked in and humbly reminded, “Master, your break time is over, next on the schedule would be ...”

“Go get Jeb right now!”

At the Fal Mech-Pilot Association (FMPA), the shortie was chatting with the tallie.

The tallie laughed, “Did you check out that match with YC?”

“I did!” The shortie nodded.

“How was it?”

“He has very firm foundation in his skills. Not many men could be better in this regard!”

The tallie was a bit surprised, “Oh, that means you think that he is underperforming in everything else than the basic moves?”

“Yes, I do agree the fact that he still needs some tweaks in other aspects of piloting, but I must say, he sure had some shocking growth over time!”

The tallie agreed, “Right! His talent is beyond expertise! A bright future lies ahead of him!”

“Yeahhh!”

“What’s your count on him?”

Shortie was proud, “In 3 years, he would still not even be my opponent!”

The tallie giggled, “What about 3 years after?”

“Well it would have to depend on his rate of improvement! But at this point, there’s a high chance he could easily surpass me in 3 years...”

The tallie lowered his voice, “I guess they had started to notice him, haven’t they?”

“Such talent, with such a grand debut he made in the battlefield, how he could expect they would not notice?”

“Do you think he would be chosen?”

The shortie asserted, “Of course he would!”

“Are you sure?”

The shortie was serious in his tone, “That man was as if he was born for mech!”

“But... the FMPA says they don’t even have a profile for him!”

“Well then, just let them be bothered with that, we watch our match!”

The tallie chuckled, “Right!”

# Chapter 21: Into the Woods

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As expected, nothing else mattered to Ye Chong – nothing but the opponent before him.

The battlefield was set the woods; which was not commonly used since most mech pilots today combat in space. Even within the atmosphere, battles usually took place in the sky, which was why mech models that specialized in shooting became conventional.

Shooting was always Ye Chong's Achilles' heel, since he had never so much as to wield even the most rudimentary model of ray guns. The galaxy's government had strict policies on weapon disposal – this meant that Ye Chong had lived with only physical ammunitions, and that space pirates would not be able to resupply their ammunition from trash planets.

NR Training without physical feedback had its limits since mental and physical developments are complementary, and one cannot improve without the other. Ye Chong faced the exact same problem during his shooting practice, and even Mu Shang could not offer any further assistance.

The thought of Mu Shang lifted his spirits, and Ye Chong smiled a little, wondering what the mech was up to these days.

Ah, distraction amidst a battle was bad – Ye Chong quickly gathered his thoughts.

The mech he was using now was a deep purple Dark Shadow; a high level assault type model. The body was thin and elongated that enabled high agility at a close range; it stood at eight and a half meters tall, shorter than the average height of ten meters. The mech was equipped remarkably – two durable magnetic daggers that looked as dark as night, its quality far better than that of the Raven's. Unlike laser sabers, they blend into darkness; a perpetual threat that remained largely hidden from sight. A thirty-centimeter long sickle adorned both its wrists respectively – these

double-edged blades were made of densely compressed metal alloys, capable of slicing through most mech armors. Ye Chong approved in particular the way the sickle was further coated with black paint to avoid unwanted glaring. The mech's calves were similarly armed. Other concealed weapons like retractable blades from the tip of its feet could be found on numerous parts of the mech, and Ye Chong, who was always one for guiles and craftiness appreciated them a lot. This was far more acceptable than his little trick of attaching the barbs on Winnie.

If the mech was coated with black paint all over, it would be perfect, thought Ye Chong.

The Dark Shadow was an unorthodox choice. It had no long-ranged weapons, which meant the pilot must be skillful enough in combat at close range. Since long-ranged attacks were currently typical, this mech model was widely ignored. On the other hand, in order to improve flexibility, the mech's body armor was deliberately constructed thin which made it a vulnerable target. Moreover, while the Dark Shadow could manage impressively over a short period, its low energy storage meant that long distance travel was nearly impossible; essentially making it obsolete for space travel. These were the many reasons this particular model was left in the dust.

Ye Chong was familiar with all the peculiarities of the Dark Shadow, so he opposed of the popular opinion. Since Dark Shadow was designed for assassination purposes, undoubtedly it was unsuited for one-on-one battles. One should not blame the design of a mech when it performed poorly in something it was not intended for.

His opponent's mech was a modified one – eight bazookas that gave the impression of a porcupine, a pair of 50k grade double barrel particle cannons, and another pair of 20k grade photon gun made up part of its arsenal. Compared to guns, they looked more like full-sized cannons! There were two more supersonic guns;

their attacks could penetrate through armor and strike the pilot's body directly, causing nausea and dizziness. The smallest weapon holstered at the waist however, was what bothered Ye Chong the most – a Fallilang laser sniper rifle. Laser rifles were known to have impeccable aiming, and the Fallilang was legendary – a fifteen-kilometer shot would have an error margin of half a millimeter, and its laser intensity could burn through the armor of all but a few of the best mechs. There was also a ten-mega pulse heat ray gun for wide range attacks, covering the mech's blind spots. The mech looked odd; perhaps even ugly would better describe it, for it looked more like a moving fortress than a mech.

Ye Chong thought it looked like a heavily armed castle in the air.

Look at the side of that body - it could surely hold much more power than the Dark Shadow, therefore afford dragging the battle all day and all night. Ye Chong cursed inside – this was his first time facing such a crazy mech.

Due to the varied geography and topology of the battleground, both participants of the battle would be sent to separate random locations within it.

Time to enter the woods. Ye Chong thought coldly. One of the Dark Shadow's coveted features was its capability to reverse locating system. Deep within the labyrinths of the woods, it would be difficult to catch on to the Dark Shadow.

Ye Chong moved through the thicket cautiously, unaware that silence had spread throughout the audience.

As Ye Chong began to gain popularity, more and more people came to view his battles. Today, the audience seats were fully occupied, and multiple screens available on the viewing podium caught Ye Chong's movements from every possible angle.

It was easy to understand the audiences' surprise. While the Dark Shadow was famed for its agility, Ye Chong still managed to make his way through the trees at a remarkably fast pace without

slowing down; much like an unimpeded gust of wind. How was that possible? The spectators were shocked! Wild trunks and thick vines sprawled throughout the primeval forest; even a slow journey through the woods would have to be made with care.

Ye Chong was one that possessed terrifying skills!

However, these were merely survival skills for Ye Chong. The trash planet's maze of waste materials was far worse to maneuver through compared to the current landscape; to hunt for the mutants that live amongst the trash meant that the hunter had to move faster and better than his prey, for the alternative menu of disgusting liquid food was appalling! Even when Ye Chong first began piloting Winnie, he did not have to worry about the matter anymore. Mu's training further sharpened his skills, and Ye Chong could now find his way through challenging territory with ease.

Out of the blue, a deafening crackle boomed from the southwest.

Ye Chong hunched in anticipation like a panther, approaching the source of the sound silently. His sharp movements won another gasp of admiration from the audience.

Ye Chong hid behind a particularly dense area of the tree canopy, carefully observing his opponent.

The opponent mech had no intentions of battling with Ye Chong amongst the trees. Instead, it stayed in midair and cleared a wide perimeter around itself with its firepower. Once Ye Chong entered the clearing, there would be no place to hide from the deadly threats of the laser beams and cannon fire.

Ye Chong was in deep trouble!

## Chapter 22: A Chance Reunion

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Ye Chong was still flushed with indignation, the pain from being torn apart earlier still lingered within him.

The opponent was unexpectedly cunning to lay a trap amidst the trees. The blasts used to clear a perimeter around it were merely a bait; the trees surrounding the clearing was littered with mines, forming a circular minefield, and Ye Chong triggered the mines when he approached the clearing. What's more, the opponent detected Ye Chong immediately when the mines were triggered, and so the chain reaction of the explosive mines combined with cannon fire from the opponent led to his instantaneous and thorough annihilation! A swift death!

The spectators were wildly impressed with Invincible Firepower's strategies - the three cannon blasts used to clear the perimeter not only managed to create a leveled clearing, but also avoid triggering the mines surrounding it thus, showing great expertise in firepower control. However, the most exciting of all was how the mech noticed YC almost immediately after he triggered the mines, but at that time, both were still separated by a few enormous trees, blocking one's view of the other!

From then on, Invincible Firepower rose to fame!

That particular battle also encouraged a wider range of battle strategies, and many mech accessories that were previously left in the cold were receiving newfound attention!

Of course, this was all irrelevant for Ye Chong. He had yet to figure out a way to beat Invincible Firepower, the greatest weakness of all short range mechs! Ye Chong grew frustrated as he continued to devise ways to defeat the mech.

In a blink of an eye, his surroundings changed, and Ye Chong found himself transported elsewhere.



Without a doubt, this must be Mu Shang's doing!

Mu Shang spoke anxiously, "Ye, look for the news with ID 020242985." It did not sound like its usual calm self.

Ye Chong looked around and realized that he was at the main area of the News Square, with a news screen display before him. Ye Chong was perplexed. "What is it, Mu?"

"You'll know when you see it!" Its somber voice glazed with menace.

Ye Chong keyed in the ID, and a news piece came to live - when he fathomed the headlines, Ye Chong paled immediately.

Xiu had been at Sun Xuelin's house for days. Xiu's parents, who were Sun Xuelin's second aunt and partner, had been transferred to the Luo galaxy. The trip there was long and dangerous so it was arranged for Xiu to stay with the Sun family, under the care of Sun Haining and his wife. For convenience, Xiu had transferred to Sun Xuelin's school. Sun Xuelin's parents were fond of their delicate and gentle niece, and saw to her every need. Moreover, Sun Xuelin and Xiu were close like sisters.

During dinner, Sun Haining asked after his niece's studies. "Xiu, will you and Xuelin be having an exam for your mech subject this year?"

Xiu, who had just transferred was still unfamiliar with such things. She cocked her head slightly, and casted her puppy eyes at Sun Xuelin, asking for help.

Su Xuelin nodded, "Yeah! Everyone in school has to!"

Xiu's lips thinned, unsatisfied with the school's policy, but she still managed to look adorable.

Sun Xuelin's mother served more fare on Xiu's plate, and spoke softly, "Then you'll have to work hard! Xuelin can help with your studies. Oh, I remember you two were attending daily trainings at the NR Training Center. How did that go?"

At the mention of the NR Training Center, Xiu slumped a little, and focused on her meal, unwilling to speak. Sun Xuelin was also looking a little awkward while stuffing herself mechanically.

Her mother was surprised. “Ah, Xuelin, I thought you never liked celery! Whatever led to a change of mind?”

Sun Xuelin blushed intensely, but continued to fill her mouth indiscriminately as if nothing was wrong.

Xiu, who was feeling a little down, cannot suppress a slight chuckle.

Sun Haining appeared to be oblivious of the duo’s emotional turn. “Xuelin, that YC guy that you mentioned last time is amazing!”

Sun Xuelin and Xiu both let out an unintentional gasp, and stared at Sun Haining.

Her father reminded them, “Did you forget about him? The guy whom you said was skilled at piloting the Raven and performed a Wavy Leap?”

Sun Xuelin grew anxious. “What about the YC guy?” Xiu stared at Sun Haining with her pearly eyes, interested in the conversation.

Sun Haining was pleased to have the attention of the two young girls, but kept that to himself. Instead, he went off tangent. “Oh dear me, my plate is empty. Hmm, my favorite dish is the sweet and sour fish, it is simply wonderful! Hah!”

Xiu was stunned speechless by the man’s diversion.

Sun Xuelin, however, was already familiar with her father’s gimmicks; she immediately grabbed a large bowlful of sweet and sour fish and emptied it into her father’s plate in one smooth motion, obviously well-versed in her role as a daughter.

Xiu observed her hosts bug-eyed as Sun Haining’s wife gave a

discrete laugh, used to their antics.

Sun Haining chewed on a piece of fish, and closed his eyes to savor the taste. “Ah, this is good food...”

He opened his eyes to the glaring eyes of his daughter, empty bowl trembling in her right hand on the verge of eruption. Sun Haining sobered a little and decided to not push any further. “Haven’t you heard about the YC guy? He’s going viral on the net, his battle videos are the hottest things around, and even I have watched a few of them... The man’s got skills! Hmm...” he continued.

Clunk Sun Haining lay spread-eagled on the floor with a huge bowl covered on his face, and his next words muffled by the bowl.

Sun Xuelin made a face and pulled Xiu along to her room. Her laughs ringing softly like wind chimes.

Sun Xuelin’s mother called from behind her, “Finish your meal first!”

Sun Xuelin yelled back, “We’re finished!”

Her mother chided fondly, “What a difficult child!”

“Dear, could you help me take this bowl off of my face... That young lady sure put her strength into it!”

“Well you did tease her first, so you deserved it!”

“Oh heavens, my hair... Oh...” he exclaimed as his wife chuckled at his current state.

It turned out that he was always in the battle grounds! The two girls exchanged a smile, and logged on to the virtual world hurriedly.

Sun Xuelin and Xiu watched YC’s battle videos in fascination - who would have thought he had switched mechs, and seemed to have behaved more maturely. The uninitiated Xiu might thought YC looked cooler in his recent battles, but Xuelin understood that

the guy had improved tremendously, and lauded the moments where his wisdom brought him success in battles.

“Xiu, let’s go watch him battle tomorrow!”

“Let’s go!” Xiu nodded in agreement!

What they did not know was, at that moment, light-years away, Ye Chong was facing the greatest crisis he had ever encountered!

## Chapter 23: Iron Will

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“On February 8th, that is, next Thursday, there will be a massive stellar flare in the trash planet cluster. The planets that will have a greater impact would be trash planets 6, 9 and 13. Public interplanetary travels will remain unaffected. However, to avoid unnecessary damages, the Environment Department will halt all trash disposals scheduled for these three trash planets. The government appeals to the public to reduce waste disposal during these times to cooperate with the Environment Department’s efforts.”

Stellar flare?! Ye Chong felt a little unsteady upon hearing the news.

He laughed harshly. After so many years of enduring his life on that Godforsaken planet, it seemed that he was not destined to leave it, ever.

A stellar flare was destructive to all forms of life. It was like a comb that groomed the extents of its reach, and eliminating all life in its path.

Ye Chong climbed out of Mu’s cabin being scared out of his wits.

Upon his return, Mu gasped, “This is bad. The pulse signals are cut off!”

Ye Chong shrugged at Mu’s worry as he was too distracted.

His and Mu’s connection with the outside world was severed. Ye Chong slumped lazily on his chair feeling unreasonably at peace. Ye Chong had made his peace with death after surviving on this trash planet for years while escaping countless of demise along the way. Although, he felt a little helpless for he had struggled relentlessly to survive and believed that he could overcome his destiny, but it seemed that fate was ignorant of his efforts. Now, he realized that he was nothing but a speck of dust amongst the stars,

and could not help but feel a little bitter.

Mu did not speak, but its electronic blinking eyes suggested that its photon processor was racing for a solution.

The duo kept their silence in the darkness, interrupted only by the haunting flashes of Mu Shang's bionic eyes.

The next morning, Mu woke Ye Chong up.

The first thought that came to Ye Chong's mind was to begin his physical training, but that was immediately replaced by the realization that his life was about to end in a few days. No human body could withstand a stellar flare; not even with Ye Chong's intensive training, and so he dismissed his plans.

Mu on the other hand was focused on something else. "Ye, there's something I have to tell you!"

"What is it?" The mech looked solemn, and Ye Chong thought it appeared funny. Fortunately, Mu will not die with him because stellar flares were harmless against non-organic matter. Ye Chong took solace in that, but Mu will have to face the loneliness that he himself had gone through. Now, that was something Ye Chong would like to find out - what would Mu be like without anyone else to talk to!

"Ye, based on my calculations, we still have a chance of survival!" Mu exclaimed in all seriousness.

"Chance? What chance? What do you have in mind?" Ye Chong asked skeptically.

Mu, "We leave this planet!"

Ye Chong immediately put a hand on Mu's forehead to examine its temperature. "Mu, did you get short-circuited from all the tension? Leave this planet? How can we do that without a space ship? If it was possible, I would not have continued to stay in this awful place."

Mu was unperturbed. “Based on my calculations, while I have no experience in space travel, the attempt is still theoretically possible!”

“Theoretically? What do you mean?”

Mu explained, “I did a few simulations, and the probability of success is nonzero!”

Ye Chong fixed his eyes on the mech. “How much is that?”

Mu replied calmly, “About 20 to 47 percent!”

Ye Chong stroked his chin, evaluating the odds. “Hmm, it’s a little low...”

“And your decision is?”

Ye Chong gave a strong and decisive wave of his arm while declaring firmly, “We’ll do it! Of course we will, it’s better than sitting around doing nothing!”

“Very well,” Mu Shang calmly responded.

Ye Chong looked at the mech intensely. “You don’t have to do this. The stellar flare will not harm you. You don’t have to take the risks for me.”

Mu Shang opposed coldly, “Based on value theory, this decision would yield the maximum value.”

Ye Chong smirked, and shrugged. “Sure, whatever you say. Now, what do we have to do?”

“Repair the pilot’s cabin, and replenish our energy supply. I will require a great amount of energy!”

The pair made haste to gather all the energy cells, and connected them to the solar panels.

Ye Chong sat in the pilot’s cabin and inspected the palm-sized hole on the left wall. By the seared edges of the hole, it must have been the result of a laser weapon. Ye Chong sighed

dishearteningly, “This will not be easy, and we don’t have the required materials or the tools!”

“If you can’t fix it, the chances of your survival in the cabin are zero!” Mu said sternly.

Ye Chong was despondent, but gritted his teeth and continued to resolve the problem. Materials, materials... Ye Chong mumbled quietly. The metals in the trash were not fit for interstellar travel, so what now?

What he needed was a strong and resilient material with good impact endurance; preferably flat pieces since he did not have the tools to shape the raw material.

Unexpectedly, Ye Chong finally pieced the puzzles together - he knew exactly where to get what he wanted!

Mu flew past mountains and mountains of trash with Ye Chong sitting in its cabin, and enjoying the thrill of the rapid flight. But the hole in the cabin whizzed from the winds, dampening his mood.

“Are you sure they are useful?” Mu Shang asked, evidently doubtful.

Ye Chong replied unconvincingly, “It should be... I remembered even Winnie could not pierce through them.”

Ye Chong was referring to the scales of the iron lizard. The creature sat firmly on top of the trash planet’s food chain. It was vicious, and boasted impossible strength, but the most troublesome feature of all was the defensive system of scales covering its body - scales that were so strong, they defy metallic blades and bullets.

Ye Chong had found an iron lizard’s nest by accident once, but dared not have purposes to fight the beast. He was certain that Winnie would not be able to withstand a blow from the reptile’s humongous tail. He had also witnessed the lizard’s clash with a



group of crimson newts which ended in minutes. The lizard had plunged its way mightily through the newts, unhindered by the greater number of its enemies, and that left a deep impression in Ye Chong. The sharp claws of the crimson newts would normally slice through metal, but they left no marks on the scales of the great lizard. That too was something that Ye Chong remembered, and was now convinced they were exactly what he needed.

They were closing in on the lizard's nest, and Ye Chong signaled Mu Shang to slow down.

The seven-meter long titanium pole was sharpened to a point, gleaming coldly.

As expected, the iron lizard was in there, delightfully savoring the meat of a crimson newt. Newt meat was good fare, and was the lizard's favorite food as well. Ye Chong knew how delicious the crimson newts can be too, but those creatures hide well, and were not easy prey; only the iron lizard could put their claws to the challenge and claim them as food.

As Mu Shang flew calmly towards the lizard, Ye Chong bubbled in excitement - this was going to be a duel between the strongest of Trash Planet 6, how could he not?

## Chapter 24: Lizard Slayer

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Mu stepped forward elegantly, as if strolling leisurely through a garden, giving no signs of what he was about to do. One of his arms wielded a seven-meter long titanium pole, pointed at an angle towards the feasting iron lizard.

The lizard's brown body was covered with a thick layer of powdery blue scales. It rose, as if aware of somebody approaching with an intention to kill, and its blood red eyes locked onto Mu Shang. Ye Chong, despite sitting inside Mu Shang's cabin, felt a cold shudder.

The lizard looked fearsome enough lying around its meal; now that it raised its head, it looked like an armor-clad hill, casting a large shadow on the ground.

Mu Shang kept his thoughts to himself, silently observing the beast from where it stood, as though he was God looking down arrogantly from high above, and the lizard was but an insignificant ant.

The lizard behaved cautiously, as though sensing the dangers ahead. It scratched the earth with its forelegs repeatedly and growled.

Ye Chong was viewing the exchange from an entirely different perspective. With his helmet on, he could see his surroundings from various angles thanks to Mu Shang's numerously concealed cameras. A seamless integration with the photon processor meant that Ye Chong felt as though he was not in the cabin, but right in front of the lizard itself.

Ye Chong gaped, for this... This was too amazing! Although Ye Chong had gone through NR Training and piloted a few mechs, not one of them could compare to Mu Shang - all the other mechs could only show the external view from multiple display screens.

For the very first time, Ye Chong thought of Mu Shang's origins as shrouded in mystery.

Before he could reflect any further, his view abruptly changed, and a rotating hologram of the iron lizard appeared before him, until a beep was sounded. The hologram was overlaid with a network of tiny squares and a square below the lizard's chin turned red.

Ye Chong heard an unfamiliar electrically synthesized voice declare, "Scanning completed, target confirmed!"

Mu leapt from a tall mountain of trash, silent like a bat. If the full moon was behind the mech, one might mistake it as a Prince from the orbiting natural satellite in all its elegance and reserve, fatally alluring.

Can a mech have human qualities? Ye Chong could not believe his eyes, but the events were unfolding right before him, and the truth was undeniable.

Suddenly, his vision shifted, and Ye Chong found himself staring right into the lizard's eyes. Ye Chong felt his heart race - at this distance, he could even make out the peculiar patterns on the lizard's scales.

If anyone were there to witness what had happened, they would have described it as an inexplicable event - Mu Shang was in mid-air as he suddenly vanished, and appeared just as unexpectedly to the side of the lizard's head. It was as if the mech broke the rules of space and time, appearing and disappearing at will.

That was why Ye Chong suddenly found the lizard right before him.

The lizard was also surprised; its large head raised, and its hind legs stepped back.

Right when the lizard raised its head, there was a flash of silver - the titanium pole's sharp end drew a silver arc in the air, reflecting

light off its tip. Mu had swung the pole fast and steady, and the wind shrieked as though the weapon had damaged the fabric of space itself.

SHIICK! The pole penetrated deep into the lizard's exposed throat. The iron lizard's eyes widened, its maroon eyes fixed on Mu. The mech did not return the gesture, but retreated to about twenty meters away from the lizard and observed his work.

The lizard seemed to come a realization of what had happened. It whined piercingly in vain, its voice echoing through mountains of trash, until it fell silent. The lizard's huge eyes were devoid of life, as the creature was finally dead. Saliva mixed with blood drooled from the edges of its mouth, trickling out from the inch-wide gaps between its teeth onto the ground.

This was the first time Ye Chong witnessed Mu's true strength! And it was strong as hell!

Ye Chong could not forget that fatal blow from the titanium pole - that scene with the silver arc coupled with the whiz from the weapon's swing through the air kept playing in his head over and over again.

He did not really hear Mu asking him to start peeling the scales, as he was still very much distracted and was in a daze.

It took him awhile to shake off the euphoria and began removing the lizard's scales.

Ye Chong spoke as he worked, "Mu, that stab of yours was perfect! Absolutely perfect!"

Mu was unmoved. "Perfect? Far from it! That stab was lacking something that is most important!"

Ye Chong was baffled, as his hands stopped working. "What's this most important thing?"

Mu stopped working too, and patiently explained, "It's the spirit! Although that stab of mine was perfect in terms of power, angle

and opportunity, it still lacked spirit, or rather, it lacked a soul! While I do not know who said this, but it was stored in my memory chip. I believe there must be something right about this statement. However, I had been unable to grasp what it is. My skills have already utilized the potential of today's photon processors to its maximum, but in end, I am not human! This soul thing seemed to be something unique to humans!"

"Spirit..." Ye Chong murmured, as he fell into deep thought. All this while, he had thought himself to be an able mech pilot, and his battles seemed to prove the point. But watching Mu's attack earlier made him realize that he still had much to catch up with - as he was, he could not possibly evade that stabbing attack. However, Ye Chong kept himself optimistic. Being discouraged and feeling inferior would not help him - Ye Chong believed that, with hard work, he could achieve and even surpass Mu's abilities!

Mu lifted a piece of lizard scale and bended it here and there. "Not bad! Its strength is at 8.12, and its resilience is between 7.0 and 7.2. Such solid material coupled with high resilience is sure a rare find!"

The scale was placed on the ground, and Mu directed his right arm at it. A silver glow zoomed towards the scale, and Ye Chong heard a slight thump, as dust around the scale was sent flying in waves away from the center, where the scale lay.

Mu picked up the scale - besides a little mark at its center, the scale was largely untouched. Mu nodded approvingly. "This is good material. Ye, let us not waste any of it!"

Ye Chong agreed. "Of course, we might not come across something as good as this again!" There were cracks spreading outwards like spiderwebs where the scale laid, and Ye Chong shuddered internally.

The pair removed all the scales from the lizard's body. Ye Chong bet that the creature had never been so naked before! He had also

collected bottles of the iron lizard's blood. Of course, he was also curious as to how the meat tasted like, and so Ye Chong severed off its front limb and brought it home, reluctantly leaving the rest of the lizard's huge carcass behind. Tsk tsk, too bad I need to get out of this place quick, or your meat would have lasted me a good long time!

# Chapter 25: Into Darkness

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“Are you sure about this?” Mu Shang skeptically asked.

Ye Chong shrugged helplessly and said, “I don’t know, this stuff was always taken care of by my Papa, and I’ve only tried it a few times. Plus, we used giant landworms’ blood back then, how can we get those now when we’re running out of time? I just thought it might be worth trying to use the lizard’s blood! It will be best if it works out, else we’ll have to start digging for those worms!”

Ye Chong poured the iron lizard’s blood into a container, added a few nameless ingredients, and heated the container with a stove placed underneath. A moment later, the liquid mixture started to bubble, and Ye Chong continuously stirred it with a stick. The liquid gradually turned red, then blue; the bluish glow on Ye Chong’s face made him look like an evil witch concocting a cursed potion. Even the ever daring Mu flashed his bionic eyes in alarm.

They had obtained the iron lizard’s scales, and those were indeed good for repairing the cabin, but soldering the scales with the metallic hull of the mech was a big problem! There were no tools at hand, and while one could say that one cannot make bricks without clay, having only clay without any appropriate tools did not mean bricks would come easy.

Fortunately, Ye Chong was bright, and came up with an alternative way! Back when he tried to attach the barbs on Winnie’s knees, Papa had a few ideas and, after a few trials and errors, invented an odd formula to produce a strong binding agent. The formula was effective - or at least, Winnie’s barbs had survived dozens of impacts without it falling off - and that was why Ye Chong was confident with the binding agent.

However, replacing landworm’s blood with the iron lizard’s might affect the results, and he was a little anxious about it.

Ye Chong carefully stirred the liquid in the container, and

stopped when the liquid began to radiate a faint fragrant smell. As Ye Chong inhaled the alluring smell, he suddenly had a thought that, perhaps, this liquid would taste amazing... And just as quickly, he banished that devilish thought. Impulse is the devil, impulse is the devil... Ye Chong repeated the mantra in his mind, but when his vision passed by the stirring stick's end dipped in blue, Ye Chong could not help but swallow a hard gulp.

He took out two pieces of metal sheets, painted a layer of the binding agent on them, and immediately stuck them together and dropped them into the water tank beside him. The blue liquid squeezed out between the boards when it met with water and turned colourless in the blink of an eye.

Ye Chong scooped up the two metallic sheets and wiped them dry. He then passed them to Mu Shang.

“It’s done?” Mu Shang asked.

Ye Chong replied carelessly, “I don’t know, that’s why I need you to test it!”

Mu took the boards and tested them a little. “They seem alright, but what we want is to bind biological and metallic materials together!”

Ye Chong smiled at that. “I’ve already thought of that!” He procured a tiny piece of iron lizard scale.

The experiment was a success, or at least, they were successful under these conditions!

Ye Chong then took the largest scale he could find, brushed on a thick layer of blue liquid, and slapped it over the large hole in the cabin. The hole was sealed firmly, but Ye Chong was not satisfied yet, and added a few more scales on top.

Mu Shang did not mince its words. “Your handiwork is absolutely ugly!”

Ye Chong observed the crude patching of the cabin’s walls, and



declared, “That may be, and I might not know much about it, but this could be an artwork of enormous depth! Do I need to patch another layer from the outside?”

Mu Shang replied, “That is not necessary. We do not have a ventilation system. If we patch from both sides, the air pressure inside would be fatal when we make a space jump!”

Ye Chong came to realize the implications. “Oh, understood! But what should we do with the leftover scales?” He pointed at the heap of iron lizard’s scales on the floor. They had removed every single piece of scale from the lizard, but who would have thought they only needed a few? There were still many left, and it would be a waste to leave the scales behind, but how could they bring them all along?

Mu proclaimed, “There’s still space in my alternate dimension, let’s keep them there!”

Ye Chong, an athletic looking young man, appeared skinny before the huge Mu Shang. The pair sat side by side on the peak of a trash mountain closest to Ye Chong’s home. Behind them was the towering structure of the Pulse Signal Relay Station. It was evening, and the orange-yellow radiance from the nearest star lent vitality and warmth to the desolate planet.

The duo sat quietly, just like that, unwilling to spoil the rare moment of peace and quiet!

The last of the star’s shining rays vanished beyond the horizon. Mu spoke up, “The energy cells are charged! It’s time for us to move!”

Ye Chong nodded. Although the most important step was finished, both of them still had plenty to do.

Ye Chong sat in the pilot’s cabin. The initially spacious cabin was packed with all kinds of energy cells, till Ye Chong could not even move in his seat. With his helmet on, the outside view came clearly

to his mind.

Suddenly, Ye Chong was hit with a pang of dismay – it was here where he and Papa had lived for more than a decade; he knew every nook and cranny of this place, and every trash mountain held traces of his many adventures.

Ye Chong let out a long, heavy breath.

No matter where he went, it was all for survival!

Ye Chong gave a long look at the place where he grew up in, and spoke hoarsely, “Mu, let’s go!”

Mu Shang slowly rose to a low altitude, and abruptly accelerated vertically towards the sky.

Ye Chong watched as the Pulse Signal Relay Station beneath him grew smaller and smaller, until it became unrecognizable. Ye Chong was mesmerised!

Mu was fast. A thin layer of surging plasma enclosed the entire surface of the mech, and occasionally sparked due to friction with the air at high velocities. With Mu’s speed, they would soon escape the gravitational pull of the trash planet and enter space!

Ye Chong took in the sight of the deep, dark space against the brilliant colours of the nebula - with silky faded reds and swirling smokes of blue, the nebula swam amongst the stars speckled across the infinite darkness of space. The sight was truly intoxicating!

Although this was his first time in space, Ye Chong was not interested in the view before him.

Mu spoke up, “Ye, active the pilot shield system, it’s the green button on the third row from below your right armrest!”

Ye Chong acknowledged with an “Alright,” and obeyed. A transparent screen came up from his seat and wrapped around him. Ye Chong touched the screen curiously, wrapped in an oval egg-like protective shield. The screen was soft and elastic, like

some kind of rubber. This was his first time touching something like this.

Mu's voice rang, "Ye, no sudden movements now, we're going to accelerate!"

Ye Chong, "Accelerate?"

Mu Shang's reply was placid. "Yes, a space jump is only possible beyond a certain speed threshold. I only have a 41% chance of passing that threshold, and that was only in theory!"

Ye Chong was indifferent. "I'll follow your lead, it's not like I have a choice right?"

Mu Shang's engines roared to life, and they flew into the infinite darkness ahead!

What future awaited them ahead?

## Chapter 26: Unknown

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“Mu... Mu... Are you alright? Respond to me! Mu...” The interior of the cabin had turned into a vacuum as Ye Chong’s sinister foreboding grew stronger and stronger. It was pitch-black in the helmet and he could not see a thing! He tried calling Mu in his mind desperately, but there was no response from Mu!

Ye Chong panicked in cold sweat. He had always been connected to Mu via brainwaves so how was it even possible to lose contact? Did anything bad happen to Mu?

Ye Chong hurriedly removed the helmet on his head. A glance through the transparent protective shield, he was astonished by the sight before him.

The cabin was messy and the batteries were floating randomly in the air. The iron lizard on the indentation was gone as well while the former hole with size of a palm had become large enough to fit a man by then. Every ounce of air in the cabin had leaked out while the rolling peels of walls of the interior were a horror. The cabin was dead silent with the lights blinking weakly.

What... What actually happened?

Ye Chong tried inhibiting the fear in him. Despite that, he could not help but shriek at the sight of Mu, “Mu...Mu... What happened to you? Come on! Reply me! Stop messing with me! Come... Come out al...already... I know you would be fine... you would surely be okay... You are so strong... who could defeat you... Mu... please... stop hiding... power on... power on...” Ye Chong let out hysteric screams.

His coarse voice bounced violently in the protective field yet there was no response; Ye Chong yelped in fatigue was as if the aged wolf howling in desperation.

He finally exhausted his stamina and slowly lost his

consciousness, falling asleep in the shield.

BEEP. BEEP. BEEP. A blaring alarm surprised Ye Chong from his sleep as he jumped from his laying posture seeing a peculiar button beneath his seat flashing frantically.

With a closer look, it struck Ye Chong like lightning. He cursed at the misfortunes that tended to come all at once; catastrophes never come alone. The air supply in the shield is reaching its limit, and by then, the system would open up the shield automatically to prevent pilots from being suffocated to death.

Beep... The alarm stopped abruptly and the shield unlocked immediately. Ye Chong, unguarded, was blown up by the airflow from all sides. Without anything to hold on to, he was thrown brutally to the wall on his back. He looked around quickly and reacted quickly; he grabbed a hook on the wall of the cabin and stabilized his position. The sequence of the actions caused major discomfort in Ye Chong who was holding his breath the whole time who felt as if his lungs were burnt. He swallowed his saliva a few times while his left hand searched at his waist as he pulled a soft tube with a nozzle which he instantly stuffed into his mouth. Finally regaining his breath, Ye Chong's pale face finally had a tinge of color.

This precious emergency kit was kept carefully. Never knew it would be needed today! This is an antique kit sculptured gorgeously which attracted Ye Chong to take it home back then; he thought it would be a pretty good decoration, but he never expected his papa to identify its actual purpose right away. It was formerly an emergency supply kit produced by the famous Undine Corp 50 years ago. Nonetheless, Ye Chong did not recognize such kit as he tossed it right to his papa. Unexpectedly, there was once papa became extremely ill and Trash Planet-12 never had any form of medication. If you were sick, you had to bear with it. Endure sickness to survive or not death comes knocking at your door. Beyond Ye Chong's expectation, this very tiny kit eased papa's

illness and he lived through it! That was when Ye Chong finally learned the value of his little kit.

Papa stated that this kit contains pure oxygen and is enough to supply an adult for 20 hours!

Ye Chong treasured this tiny case ever since which he never knew could save him at a time like this!

Ye Chong couldn't be bothered of how clumsily he acted. This emergency called for the right solution in split seconds! The kit could only supply two hours of oxygen since papa had already used it once; if carefully used, it could last 3 hours at most by estimation.

In other words, if he failed to find a solution to remedy the issue within 3 hours, then death by suffocation awaits!

He glanced at his surrounding and captured the entire situation in the cabin. Standing between life and death, Ye Chong was actually much calmer than he should be. Mu could be in danger and he could barely do a thing to help out. The in-built ventilation system has been damaged and the oxygen supply had fully depleted by leakage.

Am I really going to die here today? He laughed bitterly.

Such a huge indentation, was it caused by the crash?

Ye Chong stepped gently on the wall and propelled to the toolkit at the corner sluggishly. It felt awkward to be in zero-gravity. Ye Chong sensed uneasiness for he couldn't control his body strength freely like he was on the land which was a demanding requirement.

Ye Chong brushed off the thoughts because it was pointless.

He opened up the toolkit and found a durable fabric rope. He tied one end at the bottom of the driving seat and the other around himself. Due to the lack of gravity in space, if you were to float in the air without anything to hold onto, you should be expecting

death anytime soon!

The idea of being dead in Mu's embrace doesn't seem too bad. Ye Chong forced a smile, trying to be optimistic in order to boost his will to survive so, he would be likelier to survive. Ye Chong continued to encourage himself.

Ye Chong thought of dispersing the fear towards the unknown deep in him; maybe this was the strong need of survival coming from inside of him.

He hovered over the indentation with caution.

The outside was dark like an abyss in the jaw of a gigantic monster; bottomless enough to engulf everything.

Ye Chong switched on the light tied to his wrist and took a deep breath from the oxygen supply of the kit and mustered his courage as he pressed at the edge of the crater and propelled out of the cabin.

The tightened nerves caused the muscles on Ye Chong's face to lose senses. It was this slight paralysis which Ye Chong was certain that this moment was the only time he could be this nervous his whole life.

What awaited him on the outside? Meteors? Mutated life forms or some other strange apparitions? To human beings, the unknown instilled the most fear.

The powerful light coming from his wrist shone everything around him!

He flinched at the sight before him and was at loss for words!

He gathered his thoughts and started to ponder on chain of events that led to this damage. A guess would be that Mu, at his intense velocity somehow crashed into a spaceship at its vertical orbit which it didn't dodge for some reason. In the end, Mu viciously thrust into the abdomen of the ship. The heavy crash was probably the cause of Mu's injury. Ye Chong speculated.

Half of Mu's body was still embedded inside the body of this spacecraft.

Exiting from Mu's cabin led him to a long and narrow corridor with debris floating in the air. Horrible wreckage was seen around the corridor. There were signs of scorches too. It seemed like there was a major explosion!

The lighting system of the spaceship appeared to have been completely obliterated. The darkness of the corridor sent chills to his spine. It exudes undefined creepiness. Ye Chong was aware of the situation but remained calm. He was encouraged at the thought of his chance for survival!

He scanned all corners of the corridor aided by the light on his arm as he cautiously drifted to the deepest side of the path.



## Chapter 27: Unknown II

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Ye Chong tightened the rope around him which only had a diameter of five millimeters; though it could endure a pulling force about a few ten tons. Ye Chong who had nothing to grab on could merely tiptoed on the walls and zigzagged his way forward. Even though he laid the tip of his foot on the wall, it was inaudible like a raccoon rummaging for food in the night with amazing dexterity.

At least the safety gate at the end of the corridor was wide open which actually saved Ye Chong some hassle.

There was a flight of stairs through the door. Ye Chong who possessed zero knowledge about spaceship designs had not the slightest idea of where he was and what danger that lurked in the location could do to him. He grew more careful as he held the handle of the stairs and walked down.

From nowhere, clanking sounds of metals can be heard a distance away. His heart froze and quickly switched off the light on his arm. Ye Chong had a habit of immediate response to avoid getting caught! Usually, individuals with delayed reaction faced the quickest death. His eyes were half opened as they tried to get used to the darkness. He stuck his ears onto the metallic walls and attempted to discern even the tiniest bit of noise.

Steps. Right, it's the sound of steps! Ye Chong was daringly sure of his guess! He estimated the direction of the source and lowered his body as he hovered downwards.

Searching in still darkness was definitely a trial to Ye Chong's senses!

It was complete darkness without even a flicker of light. While he knew nothing of the place, finding the unknown that was lurking in the dark was too much of a gamble.

Ye Chong wandered around and hoped he would not come face to

face with the entity as he had lost a sense of direction. After leaving the staircases, he found out how awkward his situation was right away. He did not dare to switch the light back on, and in that moment he could only make it through by senses; the complexity in the layout of the place was beyond his prediction.

He was extremely glad that the ropes were still tied to him, and could not imagine how he would be able to get back into his cabin without it.

Suddenly, the sound grew louder as it gradually approached him. Ye Chong's breath stifled in fear, but continued to eavesdrop as he desired more information of the situation. A weird coincidence was every time when his ear touched the floor, all noises would disappear without warning; as if the hidden sounds he heard were his delusions.

A dense layer of goose bumps formed on him skin, and he couldn't help but shudder at the thought. Staying still to fight the unknown now would be the best choice! He comforted himself.

He stayed still and anticipated for quite some time yet, nothing strange happened. Was it really because of his nerves that caused the delusion? He thought about the measly amount of time remained for the kit's oxygen supply with every second became extremely valuable. Ye Chong shook off his worry and believed he should discover the location of rescuing facilities as soon as possible where those seconds spent on his reaction time would determine his life or death!

He clenched his teeth in desperation of getting to the rescue supply, but he needed to sneak his way to it. He was afraid that even if there was another existence on this abandoned ship that happened to be an enemy, he would have been suffocated to death before the enemy could lay a finger on him!

He made up his mind and decided to persist on his journey to survive!

Who cares! I might become a walking target in the enemies' eyes, but I want my life now more than anything else!

He was going to switch his light back on but felt a yank!

Out of the blue, Ye Chong felt a strong pull from the bottom as if someone was dragging him down! He tensed and drew his dagger without much hesitation while swiping it at his right. As dark as it might be, he could clearly discern a flashing cold light.

He thought that his swift move would have landed, and yet he missed!

Ye Chong couldn't help but flinched, and in a brief moment, a loud thud can be heard as his body was smashed to the ground; fortunately his body was built, but still suffered dizziness from the collision.

Almost instantaneously, a white light blinded him, and he tumbled to the side in great shock. He hastily hid himself behind the huge cabinet floating behind him.

Ye Chong was in a pitiful situation with a series of unfortunate events. He never thought this habitual reaction of protecting himself would actually pay off.

Before he could wallow in self-pity, smash! A metal cabinet that weighed about 300 pounds came crashing down on Ye Chong. He took a blow that was as powerful as a mech's attack when he was temporarily blinded by the glaring light emitting from utmost darkness, and before he regained his vision to respond.

The giant cabinet fell from a three meter height right onto his body. His throat was locked with sweetness as he choked out a stream of blood that escaped from his mouth and lost consciousness afterwards.

All the lights flickered on and the debris that was initially floating in space settled on the ground one after another. As the gravity restored, the room felt more refreshed. The entrance at the

stairs was shut and oxygen started filling the ship through the ceiling.

Of course Ye Chong had no idea what was going on. He was still flat on the ground, pinned under the cabinet with only his limbs sprawled out.

The door of the room was wrenched open as a dashing man entered with another fully armored man.

The dashing young man reported as if seeing land on the sea, “Number 2, there’s one more person here!”

The armored man replied, “Young master, we would take a look, but chances are slim for his survival.”

The young man assessed Ye Chong’s state and expressed sympathy, “This is really bad. He got smashed pretty severely.”

Number 2 came over to lift the heavy cabinet on its sides easily and tossed it to the other side. There wasn’t much effort needed in removing the cabinet as if it was like a blob of foam.

He then flipped Ye Chong over and examined him thoroughly, astounded, “This man is still alive!”

The young man couldn’t believe what he heard, “Impossible! Is this thing still a man?”

Number 2 too expressed disbelief, “It doesn’t seem like a man of steel to me!” Ye Chong was a little more slender in contrast, contrary to his immense strength and deceitful appearance. Even Mu was surprised seeing how there was no significant growth in his weight while his strength boosted.

Number 2 furrowed his brows, “He looks foreign to me. Why have I not met this man before?”

“Right! I somehow have not seen him before too!” The young man agreed.

Number 2 glimpsed at Ye Chong and concluded, “The material

and design of his clothing are unique... and rare too... We don't have such clothing in the spacecraft!"

The young man was bewildered, "So he's not from our ship? Then how did he get up here?"

It was still a mystery to Number 2 as he couldn't figure out much of an explanation. He scrutinized further and when he spotted the dagger in Ye Chong's hand, his pupil shrunk in fear. Number 2 recognized the dagger from experience and knew it was utterly meant for combative uses. The chills he got from seeing the dagger was telling him that it had not only robbed a life of one but many.

He snatched the dagger away fast with both of his hands. The young master ran into an unknown stranger who was actually holding a weapon of murder. Number 2 strictly opposed of saving Ye Chong's life even if he was deeply wounded! Caution was what he should possess; protecting the young master was what he should undertake!

Coincidentally, Ye Chong slowly regained consciousness, but he did not expect a metallic arm to grab him in split seconds after he opened his eyes.

The hair on his body stood, and his eyes widened like saucers!

# Chapter 28: Across Humanity

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Ye Chong was never expecting to see this after waking up at all!

Without much pondering, he identified the opponent as malicious, an enemy! If it's an enemy, then there's no need for mercy in Ye Chong's mindset. Even if it's just a hare at the front, we shall remedy it with a force used to capture a lion! This is what Ye Chong had learned from encounters with mutated lifeforms on Trash Planet-12 all these years and it had melted into his marrows, imprinted onto his bones!

There was no hesitation when Ye Chong's left hand dragged the arm all the way into his embrace, at lightning speed. Then his right hand took control, retrieved his dagger, and aimed it right at the throat of the enemy.

Number 2 was intensely terrified, he could only feel how powerless his arm was. Before he could act up, a blow to his throat had already choked him, which caused him to feel dizzy as he backed off gracelessly.

Who the hell is this individual? Agitation cloaked his eyes, he touched his throat uncontrollably; a deeply wounding strike tainted the shiny, unmarked armor of his. If he happened to be not in his armor just now, the blow to his head would have probably caused his head to be happily rolling on the floor like a chopped melon.

Ye Chong glared at the dagger in the grip of his arm, unsatisfied; trashes from Trash Planet are still trash, the quality of this dagger could hardly be guaranteed and the blade actually curved?! He discarded it right away.

Attacking without any sign of caution was also one of the good habits Ye Chong possessed.

His legs slightly lowered to charge up his jump. He then launched

himself like a cannonball right at Number 2.

The armor on Number 2 was of miniature mech origin in actuality. It is exclusively tailored for fighters and does not come with an in-built dynamo. Thus, it heavily relies on the user's own strength in movements. The body is made out of light but highly sturdy material, of a special kind, in a way that it would not affect the fighter's movement speed significantly; to counteract such weakness from the absence of a dynamo, it also contains an elasticity switch at the legs. The specialty and most salient feature is its combat-aid system. Contrary to the usual mech, a miniature mech has a high performance visual capturing component, accompanied with an almost advanced processor, which would assist the fighter in providing information for reference by capturing every frame of the enemy's action and analyzing them on the spot.

A trained fighter would be able to exert forces few times more than his or her own strength by manipulating this mech!

And such mech has only been heard in research and development by a few major companies. A successful attempt has yet to be reported, but Ye Chong never thought he would see one here!

He couldn't resist but express a strong interest in his eyes! Although he never thought of letting up just because of this obsession. This was because eventually, even if he adored mech maniacally, he still had not reached the stage to give up his life for this.

Death had always been clinging on as an opponent ever since his birth and he had never once had a thought of losing to it!

It sounds like a better choice if he were to destroy the enemy first, then checking out the remains later.

Number 2 had a frightening discovery as his eyes stumbled upon the streaming data in the hologram before him, endlessly like a great waterfall. It never stopped updating with roaring hushes and

it happened so fast he couldn't even glimpse a word of it!

Number 2 was also the decisive kind. Without much ado, he disregarded the data flooding before him and readied his posture to fight, concentrating, as his eyes fixated on Ye Chong with anticipation.

However the vast difference in strength utterly made him despair, for there's no way for him to capture Ye Chong's movements. Even if the system sometimes finally got a frame, he couldn't react to it immediately too. In the end he could only fight on intuitively. The fighting techniques used by his opponent were crude in his eyes, but he was f-a-s-t! And h-e-a-v-y! Every attack delivered by Ye Chong was like a breeze, as Number 2 could barely trace his silhouette. Hence, Number 2 depended on his instincts and past experience to counter the attacks; yet Ye Chong's punches delivered vicious blows. His arms might appear to be slender or even fragile as he lacked broad skeleton structures at first, but Number 2 was still having trouble holding on, as those fists in his eyes had already become two forceful mallets that were brandished!

THUP.THUP.THUP. The sound of fists upon the armor felt like raindrops hitting on leaves.

Ye Chong on the other hand was enjoying every single moment of the process, the person before him was as feeble as an engulfer and slow as a landworm. Nonetheless, his skills were undeniably good! A mere man that holds neither strength nor speed, could hold up for this long, and as such, a rare enemy. It was his first time fighting a living man outside the virtual world, considering how beings on Trash Planet-12 were mutated lifeforms, which consisted of either the engulfers of which he didn't care for a bit, or the iron lizards that he feared so much. Mu? He didn't even have the courage to think about it, especially after witnessing how Mu killed the iron lizard singlehandedly. His mind was set. There's no way to fight this monster. Yeah, Mu is not even a human to begin with!



The man before him was remarkable at his combative skills, but he sure knew how to stall with his solid shells outside, which would have shattered if they were produced with ordinary metal. Ye Chong was well aware that after the physical training conducted by Mu, he noticed that his strength dramatically increased. There was once that a marble training session did not go well and out of anger, he tapped the iron board beneath the marbles, which broke into pieces. That was a long time ago and Mu's demand on training had never stopped. He himself wasn't sure at all regarding on how much he had improved on his strength!

But wow, the shell had only dented on a few parts? It seems like I had not hit hard enough. Ye Chong thought. Number 2 could feel how the armor on his flesh was gradually dented by each punch the person pulled, which skyrocketed the terror in him, Is this person still human?!

He jumped to the back and shrieked, "Stop!!"

Ye Chong didn't seem to concern himself with the surrendering statement the armored guy made. He just grabbed his arms and pulled him into embrace, as his stability is disrupted by the overwhelming force. He fell and that was when Ye Chong delivered a kick at his abdomen using his knee. One heavy kick!

THUMP. The sound went off and Number 2 was on the ground, like a pool of mud.

Ye Chong by then nodded in satisfaction. It's not that he didn't hear him, it was simply... What has it to do with me? It would give him far more security to have an upper hand in the entire situation, especially in a foreign place like this!

Ye Chong turned to the young man, dazed at the side.

The dark pupils in the eyes of the young man were filled with infinite worry and dread. Upon seeing Ye Chong approaching, his body quivered helplessly.

Ye Chong untied the ropes around his waist and had just found out the fact that he was no longer floating. He cautiously pulled out the breathing tube of the kit from his mouth and breathed twice. Yes! I really can breathe! He was more than joyful.

A voice came from behind him, “Please don’t hurt him! We surrender!” Number 2 grasping his stomach in pain, trying to get back into stance.

He turned around. This shellcrab is quite tenacious, isn’t he?

“Surrender?” He halted as this was his first experience in dealing with such a response. The mutated lifeforms on Trash Planet had never talked about surrendering, for they never feared death. They would just bite the enemy, even in their dying moments.

Surrender? Why surrender? Doesn’t surrender mean being willingly treated into anything by the enemy? Wasn’t that a demand for death too? Ye Chong had never seen a mutated lifeform giving in, letting its prey go when it gave up fighting back during an encounter. If it would still be death in the end, what’s the point of surrendering? Ye Chong did not get it!

Number 2 added pitifully, “Yes, we surrender. But please don’t hurt him!”

Ye Chong took a glance at the coward before him.

## Chapter 29: Across Inhumanity

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The young man who had a rather skinny appearance and pale skin, which was also dreadfully pale by then, was flattening his thin lips. He had that air of nobility, as he looked at himself rigidly, forcing himself to act calm, yet anxiety and insecurity flowed in the expression of his eyes, which exposed his actual thoughts.

Looking at the enemy getting up laboriously, Ye Chong was thinking about delivering more blows to completely extinguish the fighting will of the person. As he thought on, he gradually uttered, "I accept your surrender. But you have to get out of your mech first." Without the mech's protection, Ye Chong was confident that he could break his opponent in three snaps! If he misbehaved, that is. Plus he never thought of killing them from the beginning, he did it merely in self-defense; not to forget that his survival depended on these two, as everything on the spacecraft was truly foreign to him, he would need their guidance.

If the crumbling armored man honestly planned for a counterattack, Ye Chong would have absolutely smashed him to the ground first. He would not leave out any potential loophole to be turned as a threat against him.

Nonetheless, the person's immediate agreement was expected, "Alright!" How would he dare to have any form of hesitation anyway? The person before him was a violent striker, whose every attack could cost his life and strength-wise, they were two sides of a tangent. There's nothing to bargain to begin with, and thus he had to surrender. Number 2 was resolute too, for if it was a surrender, then it would be done straight away, just to prevent the intruder from shifting the blame to the young master. That was a scene he did not want to witness the most.

The young master at the side, was also holding curiosity as he stared at Number 2. Number 2 had been his bodyguard for years,

but Number 2 always showed up in the armor he had already been used to seeing. Frankly speaking, he had yet to see what Number 2 looked like under that mech.

Number 2 acted quickly. His mech was rapidly warped into the alternate dimension.

The young man laid his eyes upon Number 2 without the armor. He was stunned. The scene before him was unbelievable. Number 2, who had responsibly protected him side by side for all these years, was never expected to be a woman, a total beauty to add as well!

Her golden hair hung on her shoulder like a waterfall's broad stream, a demure face that could look both sweet and solemn, with a pair of eyes that lustered like sapphires in the sky of a starry night, a charmingly slender physique; the fitting suit on her body illustrated her lovely curves, the body of a lusty devil that contained fair long legs that would leave men drooling.

Even if the young master had been living in a family of noblemen, who had seen a variety of beauties, he was still deeply captivated by Number 2, as his eyes were glued on her.

Meanwhile, Ye Chong was thinking, hmm... Great!

The mech seems to be manipulated by brainwaves!

He spoke blandly, "Hey, pass me the portal switch to your mech."

Number 2 had been observing Ye Chong's facial expression ever since the moment she left her mech. She had hardly revealed herself on the outside before, but she was outright confident about her appearance. Like the other bodyguards who were picked among the most beautiful to protect important members of the family, she was adopted and trained since childhood and what made her outstanding was her gift of loving charm. The instructor had once taught that if appearance and body were utilized well, it would be the final weapons, for the situation could be turned!

And... that was the moment she lost her entire confidence on her charm in front of Ye Chong.

This fearsome rascal actually ignored her, as if she never existed. Am I really not charming at all? Well at least she still had the young master's full attention – that was rather comforting. She had been serving the young master for 5 years and knew fairly well about this very young man before her. He would never think about anything negative about her. His eyes contained pure admiration!

She paused for a second, pulled a bracelet of artisan craft off her wrist and tossed it to Ye Chong.

Ye Chong caught it without hassle. He looked at it for a while and removed the miniature battery from it, which he then pocketed both items. Number 2, who had her eyes fixed on Ye Chong's skillfulness, had her hopes obliterated! Even if their strength differed a lot as well as giving in and staying benign, the man still remained cautious throughout the process. This was scary!

Ye Chong signaled her to come forward.

Number 2 came forward in anticipation.

Without hesitation, Ye Chong took the ropes from his body and tied her up, as he warned, "You better be not thinking of doing anything! If not... Hehehehe..." His actions were crude as if he was tying a mutated lifeform back on his planet, without showing much concern towards the frail beauty before him and brutal enough to bring tears in Number 2's eyes of pain. But the homicidal stare given by his eyes as he gave his warning sent chills down her spine.

Ye Chong walked towards the boy after that.

Number 2 boomed, "What are you going to do? You promised me not to hurt him! Remember your words! Keep your words!" Her voice was different from the time she spoke in her mech, it was rather crisp, clear and angelic.

Ye Chong did not even turn his head, “Hurt him? I never thought of that! But well, I still think it would be safer to tie him up!”

He walked in front of this young man. The boy lifted his chin in pride, forcibly using his stare in contempt and his dreadfully pale skin had reddened dramatically as his expression appeared calmer.

Number 2 panicked in her mind. She should have been aware that the young master was quite stubborn by nature. She helplessly begged the young master to not enrage the outsider or he would suffer.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong did not mind in fact. He could imagine if he himself was being bound by others, he would as put off like this young man as well. Even if the boy looked fragile, who could collapse within a moment, cautiously tied him up, from head to toe, like a dumpling. Back on his planet, every mutated lifeform had its own unique ability. So it would be undeniably foolish to judge an enemy by its cover.

Ye Chong’s tying could never be claimed as gentle. Oh how could a delicate young man like this go through pain like this? As hearing the young master whimpered in aches, Number 2 at the side was in anguish!

Hmm... Finally I could relax.

Ye Chong didn’t care much about his posture, as he just sat on the ground immediately.

Number 2 took a careful look of this inhumane being. Short, healthily tanned skin tone, a relatively ordinary face, except for the pair of sharp eyes, black hair with an appallingly terrible hairstyle; the hairstyling machine must have been in critical error when it did his haircut; a neatly proportioned body, without lumps of muscles, which was indirectly proportional to the frightening amount of strength within him. It was too deceiving!

Well for his age... She wasn’t sure. He seemed young but his

wariness and indifference towards life and death... made him more of a mature kind. The design and material of his clothing were really old, as if it was clothing used by refugees. However judging from the way he removed the battery from her mech, the expertise... he's obviously very familiar with the mech system. Could refugees have a mech?

Ye Chong broke silence, "Speak up. Who are you two?"

The two enslaved beings looked at each other awkwardly. Number 2, in an attempt to test him, asked, "You are not aware of our identity?"

# Chapter 30: Across Illogicality

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Ye Chong shook his head understandably, “I don’t know! How the heck I’m supposed to know who you are at the very first glance of you both in my whole entire life?”

“Then why do you attack us?” Number 2 questioned unbelievably.

Ye Chong nonchalantly responded, “More like you guys did it first.”

“I...I was just thinking of removing your dangerous-looking... dagger!” Number 2’s pretty face was reddened with embarrassment.

Ye Chong simply made an “oh” and thought through the situation impartially... Apparently the discussion of such a topic was not really a rational act for both sides at the moment.

“Okay, listen. I can tell you all that I have not even the slightest interest in you guys. But I hope for mere cooperation. Or else, I wouldn’t mind taking your lives as part of punishment for your misbehavior!” It was a blatant intimidating threat uttered from Ye Chong’s mouth, yet the expression on his face was more natural than ever, a kind of tranquility and indifference that couldn’t be explained, as if what he did was as normal as one’s daily routine of eating and drinking.

Chill uncontrollably crept up their spines, like a sharp sword stuck ruthlessly right at their throats, while its eerie coldness permeated through the pores of their skins into every single cell of their bodies; Those words from Ye Chong, in that apathetic tone, were flooded with immense bloodthirstiness, overflowing the limits inevitably, like pouring more water into a full bucket of it, ready to be kicked as it spread everywhere.

“What kind of cooperation do you desire?” Number 2’s voice was



trembling a little. Fear could be felt. The young man was also uneasy, as cold sweat streamed through his forehead.

Ye Chong was pleased, seeing how his warning somehow magically worked out. But his facial expression remained unchanged, not even a bit. It was still as uninterested as he ignored Number 2 and inquired on, “Are there any other survivors on this craft?”

He stared at Number 2 with intense focus, eye to eye.

“No! The rest of us other than ourselves are dead!” She replied without much pause while shaking her head sincerely. The sexy lips of her tiny mouth moved in crimson seduction, the captivating charm unavoidably wafted without notice.

However Ye Chong wasn’t infatuated at all and carried on with his inquiry, “So now... what are the rough coordinates of this stranded spaceship?”

“I dunno. You can only know that at the main control room!” She shook her head again.

“Then we shall go there now!” He bolted up.

Number 2 went on pleading, “Then could you pleaseeee untie us? We can’t show you the way with these on!” Her expressive eyes shot a pitiful sight at Ye Chong, with a scarlet red blush on her cheeks, which would make any man sympathize upon her at first sight.

Still, Ye Chong was never going to get the hint, while he was finding the random red patches on her face strange. Why the heck this lady’s face getting all red? Instead, the young master got the hint, as he was mesmerized by her looks. His eyes locked on her and he seemed to have forgotten where he was.

“Ohhhhhh! It’s okay. Save your trouble!” He planned to ignore her recommendation and just lift them one on each side, as they weighed close to nothing in his hands. The lifting shocked the boy

in his day-dream and it was fortunate enough that he regained his senses quickly enough to force curse words back into his guts. Imagine if he insensibly cursed this monster lifting him, he might be tossed right out of the ship on the spot. Number 2 felt ashamed of herself, her charm failed her the very first time in her entire career! What a steady man! Ye Chong slowly grew and became more unpredictable in her thoughts, with terror mushrooming about this man.

The sensation being lifted head down was causing discomfort, which was still fine for Number 2, since she had been sternly trained in her childhood. For countless times she had been through various kinds of discomfort way more than this. It was more like suffering, while this was just a piece of cake! Rather, it was real anguish for the young man beside her, since he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and was raised thoughtfully. He was frail and Ye Chong's ropes were tight, constricting him with pain and discomfort, especially when Ye Chong was lifting him with gravity pulling his weight all the way down with ropes upon him. That was more than painful, which would make anyone wail.

“So, how do you get to the main control room?” Ye Chong didn't seem to care.

She shot a glance at the young master and signalled him to hold on, “From this room, go through the green door then turn right, there would be a corridor about 20 meters long. Enter the yellow door and that would be the main control room!” Number 2 was certain that she couldn't do anything at the moment, so she only could state where the control room exactly was.

He advanced one step forward and stopped, as he remembered Mu. What if Mu had rebooted himself and couldn't find his old pal? He must be worried! Well then, let's go for Mu first! The plan flashed in his thought and began spreading throughout his mind. Let's go for Mu first! He made up his mind and glanced at the “baggage” in his hands. There's no way he could leave them alone.

I'll just hand-carry, save the check-ins. They aren't that heavy anyway.

So he carried them along and headed towards the stairs.

“Wait! The main control room isn't here! This is the wrong direction!” Number 2 shouted.

“I know.” Ye Chong raised his shoulders casually. That shoulder-lift might be rather easy for him to do but it was uneasy for his “luggage”. Poor Number 2 and the boy, being raised up and down quickly by the shoulder-lifts caused them to feel the inertia like a rollercoaster ride, as blood rushed in fluctuations, in which they grew dizzy.

Guided by the fabric ropes tied back on his own, Ye Chong walked fast. They arrived at the safety gate along the corridor fairly quickly.

The safety gate had been closed. Ye Chong recalled the door was open back when he was strolling through the place and so he asked, “Why is the door closed?”

“This... The corridor after the gate was damaged, to prevent casualty from air pressure difference, the gate was shut!” Ye Chong walked quickly, too quickly on his way there. The poor two “bags” in his hands were shaken so violently that it left them in utter dizziness. It took quite some time for Number 2 to recover just to explain to Ye Chong.

“So how do we open it?” He asked.

“Do you want to kill us?! It's vacuum on the outside! V-a-c-u-u-m!” She shrieked.

“Vacuum?” Ye Chong the fool asked on, “So what if it's vacuum?”

Number 2 nearly fainted after hearing such a stunning question from this man. Gosh, in what times are we living in? How did he manage to ask a question of common sense that could be answered

by a 3-year-old? Thinking of how the superior bodyguard of a great family of noblemen losing to a man like this, Number 2 actually thought of slitting open her own throat. The young man on the other hand was astounded at first, as he couldn't help but snicker softly afterwards.

“Hey! What's wrong? What's up with that?” Ye Chong couldn't comprehend their reactions. They would never know how Ye Chong was raised throughout his age. He only got to make contact with the outside world after encountering Mu. Even in the virtual world, he at most would stay in the NRS training field or speak to the elders at the Aurora in Gudista. So he had zero knowledge about what everybody thought was common sense or elementary.

Well, since their lives were still determined by this man, Number 2 dared not to mock anymore, and enlightened him, “In vacuum there is no air. Going into a vacuum without any form of protection would lead to either suffocation or a burst in your bloodstream, considering how there is also a different level of pressure in your own blood vessels. When there is no air pressure outside, let's say, in a vacuum, the pressure in your bloodstream would force out your blood and you will bleed to death within a few seconds. Yes, every part of your body would be bleeding internally. So you need to wear a suit whenever you enter a vacuum space!”

“I am aware that you couldn't live without oxygen. But, keep the suit. I don't need it. You see, I walked in from there just now, without any s-u-i-t and I'm still fine?” Ye Chong didn't seem to care... once more.

No suit? No way! The corridor has a length of more than 50 meters at least! The gravity and the oxygen supply were solely recovered by the young master and myself! And we found this man who had entered the room way before that. Could... could it be? Could it be there's actually a human who could survive in vacuum without a suit and not be killed without having his bloodstream

burst?

Is this man still a human being? That robust body... that even the mutated lifeforms could feel inferior of! Number 2 and the young man looked at each other awkwardly, as her pupils reflected her drained face, the horror that laid bare in her eyes!

Don't tell me he's actually born in a certain kind of barbaric village filled with beasts? I've heard of stories about how certain villages of beasts still retain cannibalism!

Oh the fear. Oh the fright. There was no other emotion other than panic in their eyes! Their faces were completely pale. Dreadfully pale as they thought on.

Oh lord! If you heard us, please save us!

Please hear our prayers!

# Chapter 31: Questions

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The trio arrived at Mu's crash site.

Of course, they all wore pressure suits even the one who was wrongly assumed to have come from a land of beasts. In reality, both Number Two and the young master would like to watch Ye Chong embark in space without his pressure suit. Firstly, they were curious, and secondly, if he died from a stroke it would undoubtedly be good news for both her and the young master!

Unfortunately, Ye Chong ignored Number Two's instigation and put on his the pressure suit dutifully. Ye Chong wanted to avoid the limelight and acting like an average person would keep the attention away from him which in turn would help him survive longer – this was a principle he abided!

Number Two was dejected – the man before him lacked the usual impulse and haste of a teenager; instead, he was seasoned and steady in his actions. This bothered her the most and kept her on edge.

Since pressure suits were necessary, Ye Chong had untied both his captives. Without a doubt, he warned them against doing anything foolish before that.

Although the walkway was in vacuum, the gravity matrix was back online. Hence, they could move around without floating haphazardly like before, and can even walk like normal. The walkway lights were all switched on, and one could see everything clearly under the bright illumination.

When Number Two and the young master saw Mu, they both responded very differently!

Under the lighting, Ye Chong could finally identify every detail of his surroundings; Mu evidently crashed in the middle of the walkway. Its high velocity came with a great amount of energy,

and the starship's thick armor could not stop Mu from entering. The impact forced open a large hole, and Mu, fresh from the impact with vessel's armor was depleted; sprawled between the entrance of the vessel and the outside of it. Mu looked like an onion planted in the soil that was the vessel.

Number Two was furious, and her eyes gleamed with rage – this was the real culprit. She thought of the destruction that ensued, killing everyone but her and the young master. The vessel was severely damaged in multiple areas and could no longer operate normally. All they could do now was to wait for rescue from other passing starships, but in the vast outer space, it would not be easy to locate another starship! It was almost hopeless! If they were to encounter space pirates, they would be unable to escape the fate of slavery – with her looks she could be in for something worse!

She grieved the deaths of her comrades but not to the point where she would hate Ye Chong. The most important thing now was the young master's safety! The young master's safety was her top priority! Due to her harsh training at an early age, she was apathetic towards the worldly ways. She was outstanding in her society, and had secured the title of Number Two ever since her induction. Being appointed early on as the personal escort of the young master, she was continuously reinforced with the thought of prioritizing the young master over all else. After all these years, that belief was now a part of her identity just like the designation of Number Two ever since the first day she joined the society.

How could she not be furious when the man standing before her was a threat to the young master?

Ye Chong was not oblivious to Number Two's rage, but he did not feel guilt. Whether the true culprit was himself or not, he did not think it to be a good reason. The way he saw it, everyone should be responsible for themselves; if you could not protect yourself from harm, then you were to blame. Similar to the relationship between a predator and a prey, surely you cannot

hope for the predator to be charitable. Ye Chong had no objections in being the carnivore of a food chain – in fact, he would be delighted to, since he did not want to be at the mercy of someone else like the herbivores. Ye Chong believed in the basic principles of nature reflected by the mutants' way of life on the trash planet not those humanistic laws and morality which he did not have a single notion of!

The young master was very excited to see the strange mech, and had forgotten all about Ye Chong. “Heavens! It’s beautiful! Ingenious! The one who created it must be a genius!” The young master scrambled towards the mech, his pale complexion turning a few shades redder from the excitement. He murmured incessantly to himself like some mad person.

Ye Chong ignored the madness, his heart constantly calling for Mu, but Mu did not move, as if he was asleep. He could not help but felt disheartened. After spending more than a year together, he and Mu had developed a deep bond; under Mu’s guidance, he had grown much stronger than his earlier self. The upcoming stellar flare was no threat to Mu, and while Mu did not speak of it, Ye Chong knew that Mu ventured on this extremely risky mission for his sake. Mu was broken because of him.

Ye Chong stared blankly at Mu’s hull that once emanated the most unique radiance now reflected a darker shade of obscurity. The one mech which Ye Chong thought to be the strongest of all was now covered in bruises. Ye Chong felt woeful and anguished. He took down the ornament that had always hung around his neck. Ye Chong did not use it again after the first time he cut his finger with it since Mu did not like staying in the alternate dimension, and he also preferred to have Mu for company. Who would have thought that the first time he used it to keep Mu would be under such circumstances.

Number Two stood behind Ye Chong, her expression unreadable – Ye Chong seemed to be distracted with his guard lowered. If she



took this opportunity to sneak an attack, she might be able to kill him in one blow! However, should she fail, she and the young master would have to face the man's most violent retaliation. Just the thought of Ye Chong's monstrous attacks made her shudder! To attack? Or not to attack? Number Two contemplated – Ye Chong's ghostly speed and strong body made her heart squeeze in trepidation, and she felt all the more self-conscious!

Ye Chong did not notice Number Two's odd look. He sighed inwardly, and transported Mu into the alternate dimension.

The young master was climbing onto Mu with gleaming eyes, and his hands repeatedly caressing Mu's body like a lover, occasionally gasping in awe! As Ye Chong transported Mu, the young master did not expect the mech under him to disappear – he felt a sudden emptiness below him and exclaimed in surprise!

His shrieking interrupted Number Two out of her indecision, and when she saw the young master falling from midair, she was horrified – with a twist of her body and a powerful sprint, she dashed towards the young master. However, there was someone faster than her – Number Two saw a shadow passed by her, and the young master was caught mid-waist by Ye Chong. The young master was dangling in the air, waving his hands frantically. Ye Chong looked to Number Two, and tossed the young master to the loyal attendant.

Number Two rushed to grab hold of him, and gave Ye Chong a look of gratification as she consoled the terrified young master tenderly.

Ye Chong walked away without looking back, "Alright, we head for the control room now!" Number Two dared not hesitate under his unassailable tone for she did not want to offend the enigmatic man before her. At the very least, the feeling of being all tied up with rope was extremely unpleasant.

Number Two held the young master firmly and followed slowly

behind Ye Chong. The young master who was still in her arms had not recovered from the shock, and looked as white as a ghost!

Who was this man? Even an amateur like Number Two can tell that the mech that Ye Chong kept was special, and one who possessed a mech like that was definitely not a commoner. For someone with a well-built physique, incredible speed and a mech like no other, who could he actually be?

Number Two questioned in her head, and continued to trail behind Ye Chong.

## Chapter 32: New Friends

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The bridge was a mess. The floor was scattered with random broken parts and fragments which made one to realize the intensity of Mu's impact!

Once she understood that Ye Chong was uninterested in being a threat to the young master's life, Number Two became cooperative. They were now all in this together, and if they did not help each other, the odds of survival were slim. In the face of Ye Chong's overwhelming strength, Number Two could only keep a low profile.

Ever since seeing Mu, the young master seemed to be in a daze and constantly murmured under his breath. Number Two knew it was a helpless situation – the young master was a nice person, not one to put on airs and always affectionate, but once he gets involved in something related to his research, he changed mood quickly. The young master was indifferent to matters of the family, but was invested in mech research, and had shown remarkable talent in the area. His dream was to become a mech engineer, but the first young mistress strongly disapproved! As the legal heir of the family, he did not get involved in general affairs but only focused on his research. All this time, family matters were dealt by the first young mistress with great difficulty.

Even this trip was hidden from the first young mistress by the young master. It was to get away from the life that he had grown weary of, but who would have thought that they would meet such an incident, and get to know a formidable master. Number Two was in deep regret; if she knew this would happen she would have stopped the young master from running away from home!

Number Two realized that her thoughts were irrelevant to the current situation and would affect her morale, so she struggled to banish these thoughts.

Ye Chong was completely clueless about starships, and needed an expert's advice.

“What do we do now?” Ye Chong asked

Number Two made a few adjustments to the controls and turned back to Ye Chong. “Our current condition is very critical, and the starship's propulsion systems are completely shut down. Plus, the hull took heavy damage with an aftermath of multiple cracks. Most importantly, the pulse signal transmitter is broken, and we cannot send a distress signal to request for rescue from other starships! Our current distance from the S.S. Zuo Yu is about 118 thousand kilometers, about eight days away by usual travel, but regrettably the emergency escape pods of this starship are damaged! If not, we could have taken the escape pods and head straight for S.S. Zuo Yu! Also, to our great misfortune –” Number Two paused in amazement that both were listening attentively, and continued slowly, “– the S.S. Zuo Yu's patrol would only search a five-day travelling radius from the space station. That is to say, our only hope now is that a passing starship would find us.” Number Two described the situation in a calm and organized manner. This made Ye Chong do a double take on the “exceedingly lousy” woman – she was not all that bad!

The young master was also alert once again, and began to inspect the bridge. As expected of a genius, it took him no time to begin restoration. His hands moved fluently like a magician while the parts and accessories danced to the unique melody of his tune. Number Two watched dreamily by the side as he worked.

Ye Chong could not help but be a little surprised at the young man – he did not expect that a fragile-looking fellow like him would be talented in mechanics. Ye Chong himself had some expertise in the field, but compared to the young man, Ye Chong thought himself to be far more inferior.

It seemed that there is always someone better out there, those elders were right. Ye Chong thought.

In reality, Ye Chong had only studied in Aurora for slightly more than a year, but the young master had begun his studies since young, with materials that were impossible to obtain on the desolate trash planets. It was inevitable that he was better than Ye Chong, and there was also the fact that the young master's family was deeply involved with mechs.

Ye Chong observed the young man's reconstruction, verifying much of what he had learnt, and got much out of the process. Ye Chong began to treat the duo more courteously without realizing it.

Regrettably, the starship's damages were too serious. The propulsion system was hopeless, and the air revitalization and thermal systems could not be fully restored, but the trio could at least rejoice at the availability of necessities for survival– the vessel's food and water supply were sufficient, and now the only thing they could do was wait.

They began chatting, but both sides were tactful enough to avoid asking about the other's background. The young master's name was Gu Shaoze, but his attendant's name was even weirder – she was called Number Two! But Ye Chong was not very interested in trivial matters. He politely gave a brief introduction of himself.

Conversation with Gu Shaoze was undeniably pleasant. They shared the same interests, and grew more excited as they spoke. Number Two watched them both with a smile, but her gaze was mostly on Gu Shaoze.

By now, Ye Chong was thoroughly impressed by Gu Shaoze. The young man's knowledge was far too advanced for his age, and Ye Chong believed that he must not be far behind the elders at Aurora, and could even be the forefront expert in certain areas.

On the other hand, Gu Shaoze was also looking at Ye Chong in a new light. He had thought the man before him to be a roughneck, but now it seemed that he was very knowledgeable in the

mechanics of mechs. The man had original insights on matters, and could often identify the heart of the issue, as well as boasted a solid theoretical foundation. Compared to him, Ye Chong must fare quite well.

If only he knew that Ye Chong's practical experience was near zero, what would he have thought then!

The pair spoke with increasing enthusiasm, and began to feel a sense of appreciation for each other. Gu Shaoze might behave humbly on a regular basis, but he still had a hint of arrogance in him. It was rare for him to approve of someone, and now that he had, how could he not be fond of him? As for Ye Chong, this was his first time interacting with someone around the same age as him, whose true strength Ye Chong respected. It was understandable that Ye Chong established a good impression of him.

Number Two sat at the side, smiling lightly as the duo's conversation heated up. Who would have thought that, about an hour ago, both sides were like sworn enemies?

A commercial fleet formed by over thirty transport spaceships was flying steadily in space.

The chief, Jing Mo, sat on the commander's seat in bridge, deep in thought. He was about eight to nine days out from reaching the S.S. Zuo Yu. If everything went smoothly, the payment this time would be lucrative, with an additional of official medals of recognition for his services. He might be able to elevate his commercial qualification a level higher, and then he would be able to trade in mechs. Nowadays, businesses with qualifications to trade in mechs were few and far in between. What he could earn from mechs would be multiple times more than from his current goods.

The goods he was shipping this time from Tian Luo galaxy to Fal galaxy had took five whole months, and they had encountered a

few crews of space pirates along the way. Fortunately, the squad of mech pilots he hired was capable, and they managed to escape unscathed. He thought of how he had hired this infamous squad of mech pilots despite the high costs. If not for his wisdom, they would have lost the goods for sure, and even their lives.

Ten days left! Let there not be any mishaps in these ten days! Jing Mo shut his eyes and prayed inwardly.

Out of the blue, a blaring alarm disrupted his prayers. Mo Jing opened his eyes, and his chest tightened!

# Chapter 33: The Merry Crew

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The trio had waited for five days.

Unlike planets inhabited by humans, space was quiet, and the deafening silence tested one's strength of will to the limit. Many were unwilling to go sightseeing in space as they were unable bear with the silence. Experiencing extended periods of complete silence could make one vulnerable to mental breakdowns. The vastness of the universe further increased the psychological pressure of quietness on people. Hence, while it was now technically possible for solo space travel, none had tried.

This issue was not something particularly troublesome for Ye Chong. On the trash planet, he had lived alone for years, and solitude had become second in nature. Instead, if he was subjected to a crowded environment, he would feel uncomfortable. In the depths of his heart, Ye Chong had mixed feelings about his future life – curiosity, fear, anxiety, yearning...

However, the silence was a trial for Gu Shaoze and Number Two. Ye Chong shut his eyes to rest, and while he was not fully conscious, he was still vigilant. Since Ye Chong seemed to be asleep, Gu Shaoze chatted with Number Two instead, as if the words would overcome the horrifying silence.

An odd ring began resonating.

Ye Chong immediately opened his eyes and stood upright. Gu Shaoze and Number Two stopped their conversation and looked towards the bridge.

The display screen showed a huge fleet of starships.

Gu Shaoze and Number Two could not help but gasped in surprised, but quickly became overjoyed. Gu Shaoze even hugged Number Two out of excitement, and her graceful face hidden under golden locks of hair blushed in response, the redness



creeping to her snow-white nape.

Ye Chong was not so moved, but observed the starships closely. It was a pity that he did not know much about starships, and therefore could not make much out of them. However, from the mechs flying out of the port and starboard of the starships, it seemed that the other side had seen them.

Gu Shaoze let go of Number Two and smiled at Ye Chong. “That alarm sounds terrible, I shouldn’t have used it!” The laser radar was heavily compromised, and remarkably, the damage was in its interior parts. However, Gu Shaoze’s exceptional capabilities meant that the radar was still rudimentarily restored. The alarm unit was broken, so Gu Shaoze had to replace it with a speaker from somewhere else, but the sound was truly horrible, and that was why Gu Shaoze had complained thus. Perfectionism was his nature!

Number Two raced to the bridge and activated the laser lights, rapidly firing flashes that communicated a distress signal.

Upon seeing the distress signal, the other party’s mech pilots picked up their speed, but in spite of that, their battle formation was still intact, indicating the great extent of their training.

Ye Chong asked coolly, “Are we armed?” This was Ye Chong’s habit – no matter the circumstances, he hoped that he would be in control of the situation instead of passively going with the flow.

Gu Shaoze and Number Two were stunned.

“Best if we have mechs!” he added.

Number Two shook her head. “No white mechs, and the mechs owned by victims of the crash were tailored specifically by their respective families. Only by sending the mechs back to the families and performing a special ID recalibration could they be used again!” White mechs were mechs that were not locked to specific pilots.

Ye Chong could not hold back his disappointment.

Gu Shaoze suddenly remembered something, and ran to a corner to search for something. After a moment of ransacking, he returned, eager like a child. “This was a dagger that I made for fun. Usually I use it as a tool!” He then passed his invention to Ye Chong, already regarding him as a friend!

Ye Chong accepted the dagger. It was black all over, and the laser-processed edge was very sharp. The anti-slip treatment made it easy to handle, and its resilience was impressive.

Ye Chong nodded. “This dagger is quite resilient, but the stiffness is horrible!” As he finished, he held the tip of the dagger with one hand and the handle with the other, and bent the dagger easily to an arc. He then released the dagger’s tip, and with a swish, the dagger recovered its former shape, undamaged by the strain.

Gu Shaoze gaped, and upon hearing Ye Chong’s comment that the stiffness was horrible, replied reflexively, “You’re quite strong. That dagger was just something I made during my spare time. I didn’t really think it through!”

Number Two was not surprised by the demonstration, since she had personally experienced Ye Chong’s strength. He was truly a dreadful monster, not like a human at all.

Number Two made to put on a miniature mech, but Gu Shaoze stopped her. “Your mech is too garish. It’s alright if we’re at home, but out here it’s really not appropriate. Besides, wearing that mech is like putting on an exoskeleton, how uncomfortable. Mm, you’re so beautiful. It’s a pity if you’re stuck in that shell!”

Number Two lowered her head bashfully, feeling butterflies in her stomach.

Jing Mo looked at the trio before him – a young master, a female attendant, and a guard.

Jing Mo focused mostly on Gu Shaoze. Gu Shaoze had the

charisma of an aristocrat, and was very modest and well-spoken, all signs of an outstanding upbringing. However, he was without the typical aristocrat's conceit, indicating that he most likely came from a family with a long historical standing. Only those from affluent long-standing families would behave thus, unlike the overnight nouveau riche with unbridled arrogance.

These aristocratic families rose and declined in the long river of history, and have had their moments, but all had survived to this day. Many families that were once as glorious as them were now lost in a passage of time, leaving no traces of their existence today.

Extensive networks and a continuous succession of capable heirs had kept the families alive. Being reserved without flippancy had also won them the acceptance of society.

However, the status of an aristocrat was not self-designated, but acknowledged by the public. Aristocratic families today were scarce, perhaps even countable with the fingers on one hand.

If one could develop a good relationship with an aristocratic family, it would mean welcoming an endless flow of money and a bright future. Jing Mo's eyes twinkled at the thought.

Jing Mo spoke to Gu Shaoze warmly, and even though they had no common interests, he still responded respectfully. The alluring features of Number Two had the whole starship's crew eyeing her discretely, occasionally murmuring something under their breaths. Eventually, some even deliberately went to the bridge to peek at her.

Number Two, who had never experienced anything like this, was distressed.

Amongst the three, Ye Chong was now the most insignificant individual. His looks were average, and lacked Gu Shaoze's demeanor or Number Two's unrivaled beauty. When Gu Shaoze introduced him as a guard, Jing Mo had even scrutinized him suspiciously; for how can someone scrawny like him be a guard?

Ye Chong was far from scrawny; “balance” would be a more appropriate adjective. However, compared to the other guards with their muscular build and alarmingly thickset limbs, it was no wonder that Jing Mo would think of him as scrawny.

Only the leader of the mech pilots’ squad eyed him a few times, looking as if deep in thought.

Without a doubt, Jing Mo was a master in engineering the atmosphere – upon seeing Number Two’s predicament, he roared at his employees and ordered them away; he then continued chatting with Gu Shaoze in an engaging manner for he knew what young people were interested in, and boasted about his adventures during his youth in an outrageous manner. The three newcomers were deeply engrossed in his stories about the various customs and practices from all over the universe, and could not help but be captivated by his narratives, including Ye Chong.

Inside the bridge, laughter filled the air, and the atmosphere was lively.

No one could have guessed of the dangers that awaited them ahead!

# Chapter 34: Fearing the Unknown

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Jing Mo sipped a mouthful of sweet grass juice and asked Fid, “What do you make of these people?”

Fid was the squad leader of Jing Mo’s hired mech squad. He was exceptionally tall, with an expression as solemn as a marble effigy, and coarse short hair that jut up straight like steel wires. A two to three centimeters long scar ran at an angle across his brow, giving not an impression of savagery, but of great valor. In addition, his strong build gave a sense of safety, and in the Tian Luo galaxy, many local maidens were attracted to him.

But these traits were not why Jing Mo valued him. Fid had good insights on matters with a steady and cautious personality. He was a good leader, and an honorable man. For these reasons, Jing Mo trusted him. If not for Fid’s reluctance, Jing Mo would not have wanted the man to work as his employee. Fid was a competent person who could stand on his own! It was thanks to his cautious nature and leadership that their current trip went on without a hitch so far!

Fid sat like a soldier, with his back straight and eyes focused. Once he settled, he could sit without moving for hours, and that impressed Jing Mo.

Fid paused to think for a moment, and replied in a clear manner. “The young man is probably the young master of some influential family. The three seemed to be genuine. Hmm, and his guard seemed to be quite capable, though I am not entirely certain. According to them, their starship was heavily damaged due to impact with a meteorite, but based on my inspection of the impact point on their starship the hull was obviously reinforced for strength. If a meteorite crashed into it, I did not find any trace of rock debris around, and that is impossible!”

Jing Mo was alarmed. “Could it be that they’re acting? Are they

spies sent by space pirates?”

Fid continued, “Spies of the pirates? I think it’s not very probable! There were many bodies on the starship, and those victims mostly have mechs!” Fid’s expression turned unreadable, “And their mechs are quite peculiar!”

“Peculiar?” Jing Mo asked curiously. Mechs that could even strike the mech squad leader as peculiar – how could one not be curious about them?

Fid paused, and replied, “Yes, very peculiar! Their mechs were undoubtedly expert level mechs. You can imagine, if more than fifty people were armed with expert level mechs, they must be quite formidable! Besides, from the condition of the corpses, their muscle structure showed that they were highly trained. They should all be expert level mech pilots.”

“More than fifty expert level mechs? And more than fifty expert level pilots?” Jing Mo gasped. Expert level pilots meant great capabilities. No matter where they were, expert level mechs were highly sought after by those who seek power. Even Fid’s squad of fine reputation, the Oak Leaves, consisted of only ten expert level mech pilots, including Fid himself. Hence, one can imagine Jing Mo’s profound shock when he found out that the starship had more than fifty expert level pilots, each equipped with an expert level mech.

Fid nodded somberly. “Yes, that’s right, I checked them myself! As we all know, when a mech’s owner dies, the mech would reset itself to become a white mech. What made these mechs peculiar was that even though their owners had all perished, not only do they not reset, but they automatically engaged into a self-protection mode. No one could use or extract information from the mechs!”

“Mechs that could protect themselves?” Mo Jing was bewildered.

“As far as I know, this technology is only used by a few

aristocrats and the military!” Fid explained all that he knew of the matter.

Aristocrats are fine, since he might be able to benefit from them, but if it’s the military... Jing Mo scratched his head unconsciously, deep in thought. This could get out of hand. Jing Mo would rather die than to have any dealings with the cold-blooded military!

“Additionally...” Fid looked at Jing Mo’s ghastly expression, and felt unable to continue.

Jing Mo believed that he was going crazy! Good heavens! He had thought that a golden opportunity had fell into his lap, but now it seemed to be a huge problem! Jing Mo panted heavily – he was not sure if his heart could endure the rest of Fid’s report!

After taking a few deep breathes, Jing Mo calmed down, and a moment later, his complexion recovered a little. He signaled for Fid to go on.

Fid gave him a quick look and continued, “Additionally, this starship has no labels, no manufacturing date, and no place of manufacture. However, it is indeed remarkably advanced. More accurately speaking, it is more advanced than all the starships available in the market for civil use!”

“More advanced than all the available civilian starships? What do you mean?!” Jing Mo was baffled, and moments later, his face paled again. “Could it be a military warship? It can’t be! Aren’t military starships banned for production quite some time ago? Even the military cannot produce them! Haven’t the five main galaxies banned all manufacture and research of starships for military use? Are these people insane? Do they not fear death?!” Three centuries ago, the government for all five main galaxies made a joint declaration, forbidding all individuals and organizations including the military from owning and developing battleships of any kind. Transgressors would be severely punished. From then on, mech pilots became the main source of manpower

for combat.

Fid went silent for a moment before continuing slowly, “You are right, to a certain extent. However...” Pain and struggle showed briefly in his eyes, but the agitated Jing Mo did not notice.

Seeing that Jing Mo was on the verge of a breakdown, Fid felt it necessary to offer some solace. “Don’t worry, while it is very advanced, it was not armed with any firepower, and so it is not really a warship.”

Jing Mo exhaled in relief. “Oh, you gave me a fright on purpose, didn’t you? Don’t make a joke out of something like that again. I wasn’t sure if my weak heart was about to explode or not!”

Fid smiled wryly. While the starship was not armed with weapons, it still defied the rules set by the government.

Fid became serious, and spoke lowly, “There’s also the most important point.”

Jing Mo nearly slumped in defeat, and cried, “Oh heavens, do you want me to die?”

Fid ignored him, and spoke his mind without hesitation. “From the hull’s damage, they had indeed suffered an impact. It killed fifty expert level pilots all at once, so one can only imagine the power of the impact. As for how the three had survived, I have no intention of investigating further. However, I had found no debris whatsoever besides the hull’s fragments near the crash site. I would like to know, what really happened to them? Was it man-made, or due to a mysterious natural phenomenon? If it was man-made, would the culprits make their move on the three survivors once they found out about them? If yes, I would definitely not believe that they would have a charitable heart and leave our crew out of the mess. Besides, I do not believe that our starship’s hull could withstand even half of that force that hit their starship. If it was a natural phenomenon, would it happen again? This is what I’m most interested in!”



Jing Mo was completely speechless, and his face ashen!

If only he had not rescued those three... Jing Mo felt a wave of regret washed over him!

The fleet flew silently and steadily onwards, but after leaving this unending darkness, what could possibly await them? Jing Mo and Fid dared not consider the horrors!

# Chapter 35: There Be Pirates!

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“Big brother, do you think they got it wrong?” A pugnacious looking heavysset man asked in a low, muffled voice.

“Who knows?” The one-eyed leader sat with a leg hanging over the armrest and his eyes closed, taking a pleasant puff of his cigar. He was intoxicated with a product of good quality; naturally grown and processed by well-known experts, not something bought from a regular store with a few hundred zhuan.

“Big boss, I’m afraid things have changed!” A gaunt man spoke up beside One-eye, his eyes constantly casting furtive glances here and there. This man was obviously the general of the group.

“What do you mean?” One-eye was still lazily resting in a semi-lying posture.

The gaunt general spoke lowly, “Big boss, think about it, it’s been six days since there has been any news from our spy from within, this does not bode well! Besides, we’ve been waiting here for quite a few days, and usually they would have arrived by now!”

“Mm!” One-eye nodded approvingly. “You’re right! Then what do you think should be done? Surely we cannot return the deposit?” He looked displeased.

The gaunt general smiled slyly. “Don’t worry about it big boss. That fellow would not dare to leak this information. He is more afraid of us than blowing his cover. Once the news is out, we would only suffer from a little reputational blemish, but that fellow, he would be utterly disgraced! Since we’ve already taken the money, there’s no way we’re giving them back!”

One-eye laughed heartily, and patted his general on the shoulder. “Right, right, you’re really the clever one! Then there’s nothing left for us here now, right?”

The heavysset man panicked. “Big boss, returning with nothing to

show is not favorable, the other brothers would surely complain!”

One-eye stroked his chin, deep in thought. “You’re right. Returning empty-handed will tarnish our morale!” Just then, a servant came running while panting, and spoke agitatedly, “Big boss, there’s a fat lamb right ahead, and a very big one at that!”

One-eye tilted his head back and laughed at the sky. “It seems that our luck has arrived, whether we want it or not. Tell the brothers to get ready!”

Ye Chong and the pair sat in a room.

Gu Shaoze peeked at the door, and spoke in distress, “What now? They wouldn’t detain us, would they? Why have someone guarding outside? Are we prisoners now?”

Number Two was pained by the young master’s despair, and consoled him. “Young master, do not worry, they’re only doing this because they’re suspicious of our identities. Without any confirmation, they would not dare to do anything to us!”

Ye Chong could not be bothered to entertain them. He shut his eyes and rested, preserving his strength. In this unfamiliar territory, Ye Chong did not let his guard down. His body was in a very peculiar state, ready to launch a fatal strike at the enemy at any time.

As for the two guards outside watching the door, Ye Chong was not perturbed by them. He did not think those two were a threat nor have the capabilities to restrain him.

Ye Chong had always felt odd, for the people he met seemed to be quite fragile physically. It was strange that such a weak body would surely not withstand even a slightly powerful hit. Did they not know that the body was the essence of everything? It’s really confounding!

Gu Shaoze observed Ye Chong. While he admired Ye Chong’s calmness, he was curious as to what the man was up to before

getting into this mess.

The two guards outside were expert level pilots. The squad leader's repeated warnings were still fresh in their heads, and they had always trusted him. Hence, while they felt that having two expert level mech pilots to guard three nobodies was a little excessive, they still obeyed the order unquestionably.

Unexpectedly, a few orders came through the comms device in their ear, and their expressions immediately changed. Both exchanged a look of surprise. One of them opened the door and spoke to the three solemnly, "Everyone, please do not leave this room, else your safety is not guaranteed!"

Number Two asked worriedly, "My two good sirs, what happened?"

The other guard hesitated a moment before speaking, "We are under attack from space pirates! It seems like the Crimson Hawk!"

"Crimson Hawk?!" Gu Shaoze and Number Two gasped in unison, their faces paled in an instant.

Their responses were expected by the two pilots, and one of them spoke, "We're going into battle now. Please, do not worry. We'll put our best into this!" The last phrase was spoken with great determination, as if the only alternative of success was death, and this commanded respect.

"We're off now! You all take care!" The pair went outside in a hurry, leaving the three behind in the room.

"Crimson Hawk? How is this possible?" Number Two murmured in a daze, her face the image of despair. Gu Shaoze was also deeply troubled, and upset at the situation they were in. Only Ye Chong looked the same as before, fully composed.

"What's the Crimson Hawk?" Seeing the two in fear and trepidation, Ye Chong was curious as to the cause.

The pair looked at Ye Chong like he was an idiot. "Are you really

human? How could you not know the Crimson Hawk?”

“Are they any good?” Ye Chong asked.

“Oh heavens, how can someone ask such a ridiculous question like that on this day and age?” Gu Shaoze looked like he could faint at any moment. His pallor was the perfect depiction of someone with severe anemia.

Number Two grudgingly managed an explanation. “The Crimson Hawk is a powerful crew of space pirates. I don’t know if they are the strongest amongst the pirates, but they are undoubtedly the most notorious. Compared to other pirate crews, they are more ruthless. Those who were captured rarely escaped alive.”

Ye Chong cocked his head to one side and thought for a moment. “What you’re saying is that they will surely invade this ship?”

Number Two nodded. “Definitely!”

Ye Chong stood abruptly, surprising the two.

Gu Shaoze was flustered. “What are you up to? Don’t do anything rash! They kill without so much so at the snap of a finger!” Suddenly, Gu Shaoze quieted in realization, remembering that this man was just the same.

“I need mechs! Do you know where to find them?” Ye Chong asked nonchalantly.

Number Two felt that the man before him was truly an enigma. He was calm in the face of such impossible odds, and still high in spirits for the fight. Perhaps only the ignorant could be fearless!

“At the bottommost level is the cargo bay, usually there would be a few backup mechs so that pilots whose damaged mechs could not be repaired in time can still resume combat. For a commercial fleet like this with many mech pilots onboard, surely there would be a few of those backups.” Number Two may not feel that this struggle could have any effect, but in her heart there was still a ray of hope. If he succeeded, then the young master would be saved!

“How do I get to the cargo bay?” Upon hearing that there were mechs available, Ye Chong’s eyes suddenly blazed brightly.

The cargo bay’s entrance was locked tight, and to open the door would require a passcode.

There was no time to ask anyone for passcodes. Ye Chong took a deep breath, and in an instant, his chest expanded like a wind box; every muscle of his body began to burn like fire, as if he was inhaling hot air! Ye Chong bent his knees to a horse stance, angled his arm and closed his palm into a fist. He drew his arm slowly backwards while drawing and accumulating strength, bit by bit!

He inhaled sharply – his body’s temperature had risen to the point of being almost unbearable – and the bow was fully drawn!

There were no further hesitations – Ye Chong howled like thunder while his right arm swung out like a hurricane storm as it shrieked lowly past the air and aiming straight towards the center of the cargo bay’s door!

# Chapter 36: Stealth Rock

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Thump! An extremely off-putting thud centered at Ye Chong's right fist as countless cracks densely formed towards the surrounding in a frenzied manner. The black entrance storage door soon cracked like a blooming flower, of white silver tainted with crimson patches. It bloomed rapidly in front of Ye Chong.

Smash! A glass shattering like-sound rang as the tiny bits of metallic flower withered petal by petal. Hush! Shush! The crack soon caused the door to have its pieces fall down in a heavy shower.

Ye Chong glanced at his right hand, where an open wound bled with its flesh lacerated. He couldn't help but shudder upon the bloody mess. Apparently smashing a door open barehanded is highly dangerous. I should refrain doing that too much in the future!

Without hesitation, Ye Chong stormed into the storage area.

He then immediately found a series of mech warp switches neatly arranged on the rack by the wall. As if a famished wolf which bumped into a feast, he pounced in a hurry.

Since these were mechs for back-up, other than some of them being specialized scouting models, most of them happened to be mechs for use in outer space.

Ye Chong thought for a moment and picked a scorpion-shaped mech model painted completely black, named the "Sand Scorpio", which had outstanding speed and a wide scope of vision. The body was satisfactory and the color allowed it to perfectly hide and go unnoticed by enemies. Ye Chong didn't pick the Sand Scorpio merely because of these features, but there was something unique in the functions that caught his eyes.

Staring at the rack, he grit his teeth. The warp switches clinked

as he swept all of them into his fanny pack.

He tumbled and hopped into the cabin of a Sand Scorpio. He looked at the interface with panic, as it required him to perform a first launch set-up.

He missed Mu. Mu was so much more convenient than this. He never was required to perform a complicated set-up. It only took a drop of his blood to launch.

His eyes glared at the popping messages on the hologram while his hands moved quicker than its shadows. There were a number of properties exclusive to the Sand Scorpio and to utilize them well, Ye Chong had to go through the settings first. In the battlefield, what lies between life and death is only a matter of seconds. A slip could change things forever. He would not dare to proceed without any form of preparation.

In a panic, he might have been in a rush but he didn't rush, instead Ye Chong carefully and calmly went through the overall settings.

Only if Mu was there... then his pathetic life would be saved. And he wouldn't have to be so agitated at the moment!

Gu Shaoze and Number 2 sat quietly in the room, looking at each other.

Meanwhile in the battlefield, it was total chaos. Both sides had experienced pilots. Beams of laser in all kinds of colors diverged, converged, overlapped and collided into each other. The darkness of dead space was lustered by the sparks of war.

The Oak Leaves were more like an actual army than a bunch of pilots. They raided in a planned formation. Disciplined, supportive, and orderly as they helped each other out. All for one, one for all. Ten advanced pilots formed the branches of the entire army, while Fid, the crew master, was the mastermind of it all.

Man shalt not be weak under his great reputation. The space



pirates of the Red Owl Beard came in an overwhelming amount against the Oak Leaves and everyone piloted a mech programmed for combat. They arrived like a pack of wolves, cunningly avoiding direct contact with the Oak Leaves and began ruffling their wings and tail without holding back. They would never stay for long on the Oak Leaves, they would just hit and run.

Judging by the situation, both parties couldn't do anything to each other at first. But as the Red Owl Beard easily outnumbered the Oak Leaves, the scale of war gradually tilted in favor of the space pirates.

Ye Chong was piloting his Space Scorpio as he stealthily tailed behind a trading vessel. With much caution, he glanced at the chaotic situation before him. He might have seen much more brutality back at Trash Planet-12 in the past years he stayed there, yet the scene before him was still casting chills down his spine.

Countless mechs swayed, glided and exploded from time to time. Ye Chong witnessed the mechs bursting into shots of fireworks, illuminating the dark space before him. Even though he had been into numerous matches at the NRS training ground and had smashed enough machines, none of those were overwhelming enough to compete with the epic scene at that moment.

He tried to calm down the rustling in his thoughts.

Stay alive... Stay alive... I must stay alive! Ye Chong mumbled repetitively, as he attempted hypnotizing himself to remind how he could not just die there. I had stayed on Trash Planet for long enough and I had finally made my way out of there! I have not seen enough of the outside world! How could I just die here?

I can't die! He screamed to the top of his lungs!

Puff... Huff... He gasped boldly. Slowly he caught his breath and regained serenity.

What to do now? At this rate, it would be only a matter of time

when the Oak Leaves miserably lose. Even in self-content, Ye Chong knew his position well, as he might have assumed himself to be powerful and invincible, but he could barely turn over the place in such situation. He could not change what would happen in the end.

As soon as he calmed down, he started to ponder.

Considering how both parties were busy with each other, and no one had the grace to look over here... He had an idea. How about I just get onto one vessel and sneak away? I had just learned some tricks on this from Gu Shaoze a while before, it shouldn't be a problem!

Wait, no. He turned down the idea himself as he thought about the limited speed a vessel could offer. By the time the space pirates ended the fight in glory, he might be merely slightly ahead of them. There's no way for him to race with a pirate craft! He would be cornered in no time!

How about escaping with one of the mechs I got? Guarantee they would not notice. Well, even if they had caught me red-handedly running away, they would send nobody to go after me. Even if they would, they wouldn't send a flock of them... If that's the case, with only one or two of them, I still have a chance.

But mechs aren't theoretically designed for long-term flights, as the energy gets depleted fast. It was insufficient to begin with and there was no resupply; Ye Chong had neither water nor food for necessities. If he even managed to escape, he would be starved or dehydrated to death in the boundless galaxy.

Then what should I do! He was puzzled, knotting his brows.

Suddenly, the corners of his eyes discerned a strangely crafted spaceship and it was crowded by pirates. It seemed to be the head of all pirate crafts. By then, an idea automatically popped up in his mind and it began lingering in his mind ever since.

As he shifted his sights upon a number of floating rocks a few meters away, his idea took shape.

The battle was reaching its climax as both sides began to have major injuries. Almost everyone took part in the tipping point of the fight.

This is it!

He made up his mind and grit his teeth, with the thought of risking his life. Whether he would be dead or alive, it all depended on this!

He sat up straight in the controlling seat, closed his eyes and took a specific rhythm to breathe. Inhale...Exhale...Inhale...Exhale. Consciously adjusting his muscles into relaxation, his arms reached the control panel gently, with the fingers curving naturally.

Right then! His eyes forced open, lustrously.

Dammit! He cursed softly. His hands illusively moved. Right on the fence between death and life, he did not let up. He dared to promise, and that was the time where his hands moved the fastest they could ever be.

Accelerate! Gear up! Within the spark of his eyes, he had hit the highest velocity as he drove towards the front of the vessel diagonally, as if the vessel was his nemesis.

At 10 meters away from the vessel, completely immersed in the shadow of the gigantic craft, he was still speeding up with his hands, away from split seconds crashing. Sand Scorpio at maximum speed, launched the additional engines in a bombardment.

The Sand Scorpio made a gorgeous curve as he glided it under the bottom of the vessel. There was barely 10 centimeters between the Scorpio and the vessel.

Ye Chong focused on the hologram and repeated the calculation

in his mind. His hands had hardly paused. Sweat hung on his forehead. It looked like it was rather consuming for Ye Chong to perform such input.

The bottom of the vessel had a breadth about 50 meters long... at this speed, the Sand Scorpio would flee from the vessel within less than a second!

In that second, when the Sand Scorpio glided through, the smooth dark body turned into dents and unordered lumps all over. The long sting was also kept underneath. The Sand Scorpio by then appeared to be like a random space rock from nowhere. The engines were all shut down the moment the craft fled from beneath.

Such a chain of complications done in one go within a second... Ye Chong could feel the amazing speed of his hands!

That was the first time in his life appreciating Mu's "inhumane" marble training!

The Sand Scorpio propelled like a shattered meteorite through the group of vessels in silence.

No one in the battle noticed the existence of this "meteorite".

# Chapter 37: Camouflage

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Camouflage – an unique ability possessed by the Sand Scorpio, by making use of the uneven lumps on the surface, it hides itself from enemy detection pretending to be piece of rock. But this ability is hard to utilize, as the activation of it has a harsh requirement where the user has to shut down the power first, while rebooting the system from utter inactivity to mobility would also require massive inputs. In other words, right when you use this ability, you have completely given up your mobility. You could only pray that you won't be detected by enemies; if you were, unfortunately, you'll be skewed!

Unquestionably, the overwhelming requirement on the precision of piloting is one of the main reasons that prevented this technique to be commonly used.

In the meantime, concealed in the shadows of the vessels, Ye Chong's Sand Scorpio crept by.

If one were to take a closer look, one would notice how this piece of rock was always either travelling right beneath every vessel or sliding through by its side. There was merely a gap between each slide-through! Oh the risk!

Everytime when Ye Chong was moving by a vessel, he would utilize the cover of the shadows to perform a sequence of inputs involving the reboot of his engine, adjusting his aspect and coordinates, and turning off the engine again.

As he passed by the last vessel, he finally could have a sigh of relief.

The inertia of the Sand Scorpio glided it diagonally towards the floating rocks faraway. In the middle of the silent and dark sky of the night, the gliding rock didn't get anybody's attention.

It was then Ye Chong realized how truly soaked he was, as if he

had just gotten out of water. His hands were in spasms, the aches were coming through. It seemed like the series of inputs just now had gone beyond the capacity in his usual training. The discomfort he had, it was from overusing his hands. His right hand was the worst as it was wounded by the punch breaking into the storage area. Under normal circumstances, the injury was nothing in his eyes, but considering it was an injury over another, he begged his right hand to not go haywire at the moment.

Sweat blended with blood. The saltiness of the sweat scorched the right hand of his. A constant stimulation that kept his hand from feeling worn out.

At this speed, it would take about 5 more minutes to get to the group of rocks there.

The lights were turned off in the cabin, with the hologram illuminating Ye Chong, it blinked in a dreamy nature – an illusionary to behold.

Ye Chong couldn't be bothered by the other kinds of beauty taking place in his cabin. He had more concern on the ongoing information in the hologram, as he adjusted his breathing pattern to slightly reduce consumption of stamina while his hands were gently fluttering to resolve their fatigue.

How the situation of the battlefield had turned out, he would not dare see.

5 minutes passed. Ye Chong stared at the approaching rocks as he inched towards. A never-before-felt sensation of anticipation raided his mind. The very first step had been completed flawlessly, what's next?

It's coming! Closer... Closer! Closer! Now!

The Sand Scorpio got to the shades of the rocks and ... full force! Booming, the engine had been turned on and all supportive engines on the side-wings engaged! The supportive engines took on

different angles and directions from time to time while the Sand Scorpio, like it was attracted by the rocks, performed a 120 degree curve, sliding into one side of a rock and smoothly exiting out from another. The process was without interruption, executed intuitively.

The rocks were distant from the battlefield, making them less noticable, which was why Ye Chong chose the rocks in this area instead.

And he would be using these rocks to complete his direction change!

And without doubt, he did it well. He was sure that if Mu was there, Mu would be giving his rare compliments on his perfect curve as well.

The Sand Scorpio had its engine switched off right after coming out from the rock cluster.

The direction of its travel – To the Pirate Craft!

By then, no one had noticed this very piece of rock that would change the outcome of this war entirely as it flew towards the pirate ships.

Seeing the pirate ship approaching, he was getting nervous.

The approach was impeccably accurate!

His Sand Scorpio had just travelled by the first outermost pirate craft. It was only a close shave, which gave Ye Chong cold sweat throughout his body. If anything was inaccurate in his prediction before, there's no turning back. There's no recalculating or readjusting the mech's angle. If he were to switch on the Sand Scorpio, even just one engine, the camouflage would be busted right away. And he could imagine how he would be bombarded into oblivion by the firearms of the battling armies on the spot.

The Sand Scorpio justified his calculating ability. There had yet to be even a slight scratch with any pirate ship and the Sand

Scorpio was steadily sliding towards the deep abdomen of the pirate craft.

He soon arrived at his destination – a pirate craft of an outstanding design!

He dare he was sure that the craft was not an ordinary pirate ship! Between every other pirate crews, this one would become his prey in no time. He felt an intensity he never felt before, which surged throughout his body like electricity and excited him till he shuddered!

Ye Chong's red bleary eyes, the tiredness, the aches from his wound, the spasms on both his hands were long gone by then. He was injected with a new form of energy, charging him up so much that he had never felt being this good in condition!

Different from being the maniac in his mind, his hands were still performing inputs tidily and not thrashing about!

As the Sand Scorpio hovered underneath the vessel, the tail was sprung open. Clink! A gentle screech came from the alloy rope. The bottom of the Sand Scorpio was a giant trochal disc, which usually was kept conical. When the Sand Scorpio's tail sprang upon the bottom of the ship, it transformed into the circular trochal disc which had itself fixed tightly underneath the ship.

The ever-sliding Sand Scorpio had eventually stopped itself. Ye Chong calmed down.

Ye Chong couldn't help but to start checking out the bottom of the ship right before him.

At the center of it, there was a circular lid dented in the bottom. Judging by that, the lid could be possibly opened from the inside of it.

Any mech modelled for space-travelling would have an escape suit for the pilot, which not only was able to provide oxygen supply up to 10 hours, but also had the ability to fly. Well, of course, the



so-called flying was only of range brief enough for one to reach the nearest spacecraft in space.

Ye Chong put on the escape suit and kept the dagger that Gu Shaoze gifted him at his waist, the toolkit in hand; he scurried out of the cabin in a flip and did not immediately follow the alloy rope attached upwards, rather he hovered towards the abdomen of the Sand Scorpio and got to its weapon storage.

He cautiously used the toolkit in his hand and removed the laser sword installed on the Sand Scorpio. Well for cannons... those were too much... considering how these would expose him anytime alright, Ye Chong wouldn't want to bet his life on these.

So he grabbed the 3 meter long laser sword. It looked a bit absurd for a laser sword.

He then clung onto the alloy rope and made his way up to the bottom of the pirate ship. He observed the embedded lid and confirmed it had to be open from the inside. Too bad. By then he instantly dropped the idea of using the toolkit to open the lid. He put the toolkit aside and raised the laser sword with both hands.

To die in space or to take another chance to another frontier? This shall be taken!

Ye Chong impaled the laser sword in his hands right onto the lid without hesitation!

# Chapter 38: Red O' Beard

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Wondering what material this ship was built out of, Ye Chong was facing difficulty cutting through, even with a powerful laser sword. Droplets of sweat formed on his forehead, reflecting the glaring light coming from the laser sword. It was quite striking in the darkness of space. He would be in trouble if he didn't make it fast! People would notice him soon enough!

The other hand of his was gripping the alloy rope attached to the trochal disc of Sand Scorpio to stay still in the weightlessness of space. He hoped that the suction would be strong enough to hold him up and not drop him out of a sudden!

The laser sword was gradually making progress as it started to sink into the bottom of the ship. Man this armor is sure thick! The sword's entire blade had already been engulfed by the ship's body but there was yet a breakthrough. There was no other choice. Ye Chong had to dig a way in. He plucked out the armor piece by piece. This is tiring with a laser sword. It would be certainly lovely if I have a laser shovel or something instead... He didn't forget to crack a joke to lighten the atmosphere at that moment, just to relax his tightened nerves since he started to notice his muscles were stiffening due to nervousness.

Back when he was at Trash Planet-12, whenever he was in such a dead-or-alive situation, cracking jokes was the method to bring him good luck!

He starkly looked like the nanobot working in space stations. And they were used for slavery.

Zing! The laser sword felt nimbler out of a sudden. Great! Ye Chong cheered. We finally got through! He carefully sliced an opening big enough to fit a man and kept the Sand Scorpio back in the alternate dimension, thanking it for its tremendous fulfilment in its role.

He weaved into the pirate ship with much caution. Right as he was in the ship, he felt weight and staggered, nearly losing grasp of his sword. He just realized that he had already entered the gravitational field of the ship.

Illuminated by the light of the laser sword, Ye Chong looked around attentively.

...

At the main control room, Mr. One-eye had a cigar in his mouth and cozily melted into the fluffy commander seat, with serenity in his eyes. His willowy strategist held hands with devotion as he stood behind his leader.

“These twerps sure know something!” Mr. One-eye chuckled, “They knew how to fight! Psh, this rowdy fella was really fierce. Hah! It was not strange for him to be one of my arsenals! But the fat lamb runnin’ this time was a bit tough to deal with. Too bad he ran into us! Hehehe! We’re makin’ some fortune this time...” He coveted the gigantic vessels, with countless jewelries of gold and diamond that flew in his eyes.

The slender strategist nodded obediently. He deeply understood the situation as his sunken face usually pale had been drunkenly red by then, obviously being overjoyed from hunting down this rare fat lamb. Such an unexpected loot! Coming out of nowhere! Surely even a menacing guy like him would be blinded by joy too.

Though blinded by joy, he still remembered to butter up his master, “This is all because of your superior leadership, Mr. One-eye. The loot is more than enough for us to live like a king for the next few months! But, great leader, there has been rumors coming from the Black Cove, talking about how every item was strangely out of stock recently. We even have the word of the elderly there, saying they would pay handsomely for any stock sent. Not only handsomely in money but also handsomely in Black Cove points! Well, I have a suggestion, Mr. One-eye. Are we sending these

stocks on the vessel right to the elderly? So that we would not lose out much while earning these decent Black Cove points which could be put into good use for us?”

Black Cove was sending chills down Mr. One-eye’s spine upon hearing it as he shuddered. The fear didn’t last till the phrase Black Cove points was mentioned. His single eye lustered.

Black Cove was a mysterious place, the absolute center of shadowy figures. It was also a paradise for consumerism, with the hottest chick, the smoothest wine, the brightest costume, the kindest service, the best mech – sexual, mellow, thoughtful, gorgeous and advanced... Anything of any adjective, as long as you could think of, you could own them all. Even those you couldn’t think of would exist in Black Cove, like the beast you had not seen before, literally everything that would be an eye-opener to you would be in Black Cove.

Currencies of the 5 major galaxies were all useable in this area, but only for services in the outskirts. If you would want to contact ... and of course you would want to, the darkest, the most mysterious, the deepest of Black Cove, namely the inner area, the core, you would need currency of an exclusive kind by Black Cove – the Black Cove points, which could not be obtained under normal circumstances like exchanging them with currency from the major galaxies, unless anyone in possession of the points was willing to exchange them for your galaxy bucks. In the market, those points were already sought after by desperate buyers with astronomical offers, yet no one in actual possession was happy enough to trade them off.

To a space pirate like Mr. One-eye, every single point was worth more than anything.

Every once in awhile, the elderly at Black Cove would announce a series of request, in exchange for Black Cove points if any of those quests were accomplished accordingly. In addition, all the workers serving in the core of Black Cove would be paid points too, as their

salary or wages. The catch that turned people off was, be it a sincere request from the elderly or a job in the inner area, they were never easy to begin with.

The requests from the elderly were of extremely difficult, where even a real extraordinary man of authority like Mr. One-eye with an army of followers could only helplessly stare at such requests. If you managed to squeeze into the core of Black Cove to work, congratulations! That means your expertise is of brilliant mastery. As long as your standard is high enough, even though you are a problematic figure for instance, it would not hinder your admission to work in the core because your strength determines everything in the core.

But well, there was still one more way to get Black Cove points. It was quite a strange way too – to provide precious information in exchange. There would be experts to rate your info and pay you with those points accordingly.

“Are you sure about the rumors, Willow?” Mr. One-eye quickly asked.

Willow replied respectfully, “Yes sir, I heard it from Mr. Jackson. Along the way I also have discerned it from whispers of some of the people!”

“Jackson!” Mr. One-eye muttered. He moaned as he thought. Jackson was one-of-a-kind among the space pirates, different from the Red Owl Beard who came in crowds, he was the lone wolf hunting in space. He might be alone, but none of the crew dared to look down on him. Nobody ever was brave enough to steal his loot. Somehow, there was a reason but it was unspeakable for everybody. They couldn’t explain why they feared to steal his loot, it just happened, as if an unwritten rule among the crew.

“If it was from Jackson, chances are it is real!” Mr. One-eye exclaimed, “But ya know, it takes far to travel to the Black Cove, we the Red Owls carryin’ such a huge vessel, it is not strange there

could be anybody in the way, wanting to steal our gold!”

“But, sir, this is a golden opportunity to get your points!” Strategist Willow advised, “I think, this is a risk worthy to be taken! Also, even if there is anyone who is daring enough to stand in the way, we are not angels to spare gifts, especially under your supreme leadership, they would not simply offend you, Mr. One-eye! If we all make it this time, those people in our way would be running away the next time they see us! Of course it all depends on your wisdom, great leader of the Red Owls!”

The great leader of the Red Owls made up his mind, “Right! You’re right! How could I let go of a treasure chest like this? It is surely worthy of some risk! Those Black Cove points were what I dreamed of! We’re just short of a few points to get us a new boat. Hehehe, imagine the world if I got a new craft to thrash with!”

“Oh, how wise our leader!” Willow praised along.

“Hahahaha!” Mr. One-eye patted his shoulder, “Don’t worry! I’ll share ya’ll some coins once I have the entire chest! Hahahahahaha!”

Willow’s face blossomed with excitement, bowing and nodding his head in wholehearted loyalty.

While they were so indulged in their glorious future in wealth, they never noticed a shadow that flashed by the hologram.

# Chapter 39: Knocking down the Stalk

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Ye Chong waited right outside the door, silently like a huntsman's jaguar standing by in the dark corners. He was anticipating the moment for the prey to be immobile. As Ye Chong explored the pirate ship all the way, he encountered nobody. It was as if the whole craft was a fraud, a hollow shell filled with no one. That was his impression till he hit the main control room and his ears caught some mumbles. He stopped by and hid himself.

He peeked into the control room. There were only 2 persons. Apparently the one with an eye-patch at the side seemed to be the leader... judging by how his only eye blinked with charisma as he spoke to another who seemed to be in respect... a respect by fear...

Ye Chong's fingers fiddled the dagger in his waist. The laser sword was too long to be carried around in a small space like this. Plus, the light it produced was too distinctive, it would alert the enemy in no time. As soon as he made his way into the craft, he dropped it somewhere in the darker corner of the corridor. He also discarded the space suit since that plump thing was too clumsy to walk with.

Mr. One-eye was giving commands through the interface projected before him, while Willow stood behind his supreme leader. Both of them were facing their backs to Ye Chong outside.

He waited on, waited for the best time to strike!

Mr. One-eye muffled some considerable matters and disconnected the transmission, gasping in the end. That's the moment Ye Chong had been waiting for!

Ye Chong tiptoed, his back slightly hunched, and sneaked to the back of Mr. One-eye. The thick carpet over the floor of the control room was such an advantage to keep his movement silent. Mr. One-eye who had spent almost his whole life dancing between the brink of life and death seemed to have his instinct surprisingly

calling, calling him to take a glance to his back as he sensed something.

Damn! Ye Chong was agitated! He sprang up on his legs and pounced quickly, with the dagger in his right hand stinging like the venom of a snake. The process was fast, accurate and painful. As usual, he did not held back. The next moment after that was him locking his dagger right onto Mr. One-eye's neck. From his experience, he could guarantee that if this blow was landed right, his neck would have a huge cut!

Mr. One-eye could hear the wind whooshing from his back. Terrified, he couldn't be bothered of how graceless he would look, he lifted himself off the armrest and bounced off like a ball, rolling to the front as he dodged this very blow from Ye Chong. Of course, as past experience taught him well, right as he bounced off, he switched on the transmitter.

Willow the strategist didn't seem to have reacted in time. He only saw how his supreme leader rolled on the carpet out of a sudden and was in deep confusion. What the heck is our leader doing?

Ye Chong thought he would have landed the hit, but in fact he didn't. That was uncalled for... He couldn't help but flinch a little. Then his sight shifted upon the Willow guy frozen at the side. Intuitively, he launched his left fist upon his waist. Wham! Willow was sent flying like a ragged doll, in a gorgeous curve, right onto the wall as blood splashed and painted the plain white wall a mural of cherry blossoms.

Mr. One-eye who witnessed the power of a mere punch being this devastating had his face drained of colour! Ye Chong was going to react.

Beep! Ye Chong jumped at the interface suddenly popping out.

The grunt in the screen was stupefied, wondering why his leader called him right after the transmission was ended. "What's your command, sir?" He asked.



“Are you dumb or what!” Mr. One-eye couldn’t control and baffled, “I command your dumbass! Don’t you have eyes or something? Don’t you see I’m getting assaulted? How about you act fast and cal-” He choked on his words and his rampaging temper was abruptly extinguished, as he saw Ye Chong jumping onto him.

He knew well in his mind, as long as he bought himself a little bit more time, his men would make it here. Just one more minute... No! Half a minute maybe! Comforting himself in his mind.

He went dizzy for a brief moment while Ye Chong then had already haunted right in front of him. He was travelling like a phantom in the room, with the blade of his dagger glowing coldly as he brandished it, making orbits and orbits that flashed one after another.

The afterimages further frightened the old pirate. His face paled further. He was not expecting a mere man having such strength would also possess such horrifying agility. His past reminded him of how he recognized the capability of immense speed more than immense strength. Immense strength could be threatening, but not as practical as immense speed. Speed, brutality and accuracy. It’s always speed that mattered most. There had been a saying among the pirates – Nothing shalt avoid its defeat, unless speed it was. One could only have either. With great strength you let go of your dexterity, and vice versa. However if there would be an exception to this balance, one who possessed both immense strength and speed... that would be...

A. Big. Terror.

Mr. One-eye never thought of having such an encounter today, with such a powerful force. His hope sank over time.

He reacted reflexively in the experience of a great man like himself. He knew he couldn’t dodge, so, girding his teeth, he raised his arms and warded himself from the fatal blow!

Sphhhlt! Crack! It was the sound of the blade piercing the flesh at first, followed by the bone crushes. Ahhhh! Mr. One-eye shrieked. The pain penetrated right through his marrow, flooding his thoughts like a tsunami wave. He wanted to do something. He needed to do something! How to do it? His subconscious urged him to do something, anything would do, as long as the pain could be lessened.

Ye Chong noticed the moment when Mr. One-eye was shouting in pain, the opportunity when he loosened his guard. Clink! He pulled out his dagger from the flesh, blood poured out like fountain. His eyes locked on, with the dagger locked right onto the throat, like a snake's fangs. It didn't miss this time!

The one eye on his face bloated, like a dead fish he was, glared at Ye Chong, as if he was in disbelief of what had happened to himself. One hand holding his throat, while his lips lifted, wanting to mutter some words but only fizzes rushed out like a broken pipe. The blood gargled out of his mouth next. It lasted for a few seconds before the old pirate collapsed into the annals of history.

The grunt in the interface was shocked by the sight. His brain remained malfunctioned. He couldn't react and could only watch on. It was when he saw his leader collapse, he only reacted, in screams and shouts.

Ye Chong glanced nonchalantly and shut down the transmitter.

The next thing on the list... Ye Chong was aware of. One last thing to do. Run!

He hopped onto the control seat and piloted the ship backwards. As this was the first hand-on experience to pilot an actual space craft for him, he acted rather awkwardly. There was quite a number of guarding crafts nearby and Ye Chong crashed into them occasionally as he made his way to escape.

The crewmen on the ships outside did not know their leader's death. They just assumed it was one of the mischievous moments

by their head. Moreover such minute impact wouldn't harm their ships that much. So the crewmen just laughed on as they watched their leader entertaining them like a clown. It would be a precious moment to behold! Of seeing the leader acting like a joke!

It didn't take long till Ye Chong got a hold of it. He realized it wasn't that much of a difference compared to piloting a mech.

...

Back on the battlefield, Fid was pleading in agony. These pirates couldn't stop harassing! His team was running low on power for their mechs. But the constant harassment was preventing them to refill. It would only take about 2 to 3 more minutes before he and his team would be hunted like a pen of helpless lambs by a pack of wolves outside. He was almost depressed.

Out of the blue, something occurred on the battlefield. Something strange!

It began with one of the pirates stopping the attack, then the next and the others... as if an infection, in less than half a minute, almost the entire crew held their attacks.

Fid, witnessing such a creepy sight before him, was puzzled.

Was this another diabolical plan by the filthy owls? These crewmen did not need conspicuous tricks like these! Or had mercy got into their heads to let us all go? No way! Pfft! Barbarians like the pirates would be religious enough to spare the life of others? Then I must be a saint too!

Fid ceased his thoughts. He saved his speculation and commanded his team to head back and refill immediately. He couldn't bear to lose this very chance.

He evacuated the team and ran back for his life. He turned his head as he escaped, which the sight nearly widened his eye balls. The enemies... The enemies! They... They turned back and ran too! They even fled faster than our team! Out of shock, his craft almost

crashed into a vessel, such an unwieldy act he did!

It was still a scorching battlefield with bombardments and slaughters.

The next second, it was nothing.

# Chapter 40: That Willow Guy

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He took a glimpse towards his back. Man! He was put into immense shock. His situation by then was like a honeycomb dripping fresh, concentrated honey, where the hornets tailed vigorously. The first ever time it was Ye Chong that felt an urge to stab the damn honeycombs a thousand times whenever he saw it. Without much guessing, he accelerated to maximum speed and prayed to God that this piece of pirate mount had capacity great enough to sustain him throughout the run from being chased down. If the capacity wasn't good enough, he's going to get cornered and shredded into nothing. If only that would happen!

Fortunately, the craft indeed outperformed the rest and sped away. Well it seemed like even a good o' pirate like Mr. One-eye feared death too, that he must make sure he manages to run away.

Anyway, at least I was saved.

Riding the gigantic craft, he ran through space.

The pirates went after him and didn't seem to be giving up anytime soon. Some even hopped onto their mech and rode on the pirate ship instead! Fire at will! They launched attacks without any pause, with any kind of weapon they had – be it the typical heat ray gun, lux blaster (spreading beam shooter) or the advanced laser sniper rifle, they even have their own particle cannons. However... Wonder if it was because the ship had undergone some sort of modification for it being the mount of the potent corsair, for some reason, when the bombardments struck, the body of the ship was hardly damaged. At most, only the sniper rifle could leave little pores on the surface.

The new leader of the pirates was in regret by then. He was formerly a devoted crewman under Mr. One-eye's leadership. It was an unwavering bond of friendship too between the captain and himself. Iron, or Mr. Iron, mourning over the captain's death

,went after the murderer, yet he was in such a pile of regrets, for why the heck did he modify his leader's craft to be that overpowered in the first place, making the murderer literally invincible at that moment.

Seeing how he was truly invincible from the shooting, Ye Chong was oh sure jolly! Later, the gap between the pirates and himself grew larger and larger. Obviously he was on the right ship! The speed was well ahead of them all!

At least he secured himself. Alert disengaged for him. He gasped in relief and switched to auto-pilot mode, before collapsing into the seat. Every part of his body was worn out, especially his hands, aching like being pricked by needles. The soft commander seat cloaked him with slumber. He felt like catching Z's finally, after being stressed for so long. He couldn't hold it any longer, the guards or whatever and dipped into his dreams.

...

It's been 6 hours since Ye Chong woke up.

The smell of death wafted throughout the control room. The bloody mess was such an eyesore! Ye Chong knotted his brows as the coppery smell spiked his nostrils. He lifted the dead body of the good-for-nothing pirate whose glory had become history and simply dumped him into the garbage chute. As he walked back to his lovely seat, Strategist Willow somehow flinched right on the wall. Wait, aren't you dead yet? This frail guy is still alive? It can't be! He knew the strength of his iron fist well, even a bulky guy like Mr. One-eye would crumble in one punch. It's no good. It doesn't seem like that kind of fist a weakling like that willow guy could take!

Some thoughts sprung in his mind. He began unbuttoning Strategist Willow's shirt and it was as guessed! He discovered a kind of cloth, light yellow and with countless dark threads crossing over each other.

Ye Chong removed the clothing from the strategist and fiddled with it. Such strength. He pulled the clothing forcefully with his hands yet there was no splitting or splatting, the sound in which he was expecting when clothes were torn. The clothing remained intact. Ye Chong was quite intrigued and changed into it straightaway. He tried punching his own chest and strange things happened. He only felt a moment of heat on his body and the pain felt much lesser than he imagined. It was then he realized the concept of how the shirt worked. It generally dispersed the damage received throughout the entire clothing, which in return reduced the fatality of attacks.

This is a nice safety charm! He couldn't let go of it and carefully had it to be the innermost of his outfit. Of course he did mutter, of how marvelous it could be if it was an overall for starters!

Then Willow faintly woke up and found out himself top-naked, and chilly. "You...You... Don't you come here! Please!" He was frightened, "Spare my life, mister. Please spare me..." Ye Chong was still directing his cold sight upon the trembling strategist. Willow gulped a few times, there was only horror on his face. It took him a moment to spit few words as he shrunk, "Mi...Mister? I'm... I'm... a virg-sorr...sorry... but... this...It...It is my first time... with a guy... you know... Please...Please do... do it gently!"

...

Ye Chong couldn't hold the impact and slammed the ground as he fainted on the carpet with his mouth bubbling.

...

Ye Chong slowly reached the dagger at his waist and Willow saw that, "Please spare me master! Please! Spare! Me!" Even more terrified, he pleaded quickly, "If master could spare this worthless life of mine, Willow is willing to follow master everywhere and show loyalty. Willow would take care of everything for master's everyday needs and is willing to die for master!"

“Hmm.” He drew the dagger rather sluggishly and spoke slowly, “Oh. Tell me a reason not to kill you!”

The willow man was sweating hard but he didn't have time to wipe it off, “I know well about the environment and its surrounding. Ex-Extremely well! If master could spare me, I can guarantee to escort you out of the filthy pirates' raids! Also I know well about the pirates around here too! I could take up simple chores like getting things ready for master or hitting the underlings. I can tell you that I'm good at them...” Over time, as he lifted his lips and spoke, the anxiety faded away as he spoke smoother and smoother till it was really unstoppable!

The speech caught Ye Chong's attention. The surrounding was truly foreign to him. If he were to stick his head out everywhere, he would be caught by the pirates in no time. Maybe it would be a good idea to keep a man like this willow guy.

The strategist was intelligent for sure, discerning the changes in Ye Chong's expression, he rejoiced in his mind. It seems it's working!

Ye Chong who made up his mind glanced at the willow strategist, “You are right with your words. Indeed, your pathetic life would linger. However, if you were to do something funny, specifically, anything that you shouldn't have done. Hmph...” His wrist shook and the dagger in his hand was sent flying, like dark lightning. Zap! It rubbed through the dented cheeks of the strategist by a few millimeters, and embedded all the way into the wall right next! The whole blade!

Strategist Willow felt the chillness on his cheeks, as well as his own doom! But he then realized he was still in one piece, he let off a sigh of relief! Right when he thought of resting his eyes, he caught sight of the shrill dagger as he turned his head, and the panic that was formerly swallowed went up to his throat again. Such frightening strength! Every wall in this ship was made out of high density low-carbon materials, which even a heat ray gun



could only leave a tiny hole on it. He never thought a mere man like his master could make such a strike. His new master was absolutely a terror!

Till he heard about his master sparing him his life for real this time, he got to relax and bowed numerous times to express his faithfulness.

He actually had his own plans. He knew, despite being the second-upper figure in the Red Owl Beard, he stayed on only because he had the trust of his old leader. Unlike the third-upper man in the crew, Iron, who had way more charisma and trust of the entire lower crew. Currently Mr. One-eye was dead and without doubt the crewmen would crown Iron as their new leader automatically. He never had a good time with Iron. He had issues with him. The Red Owl Beard had no longer a place for himself, and if he stayed, it was only a matter of time for his permanent doom!

Thinking again... the new master before him didn't seem to be an easier one to handle either, especially right after Iron witnessed how cold his master's eyes could be, bloodthirsty like an animal. This would be the kind who goes murdering without thought. Wonder how much blood had stained his hands! Talk about the number of lives who died by his knife!

But that was clearly a misunderstanding. Yes, he was right about Ye Chong murdering without thinking much, nevertheless, talking about the number of lives who died by his knife... That was rather an accusation than a statement! Ye Chong grew up on a trash planet and his childhood was spent with mutated lifeforms lurking in the rubbish dumps. He had to struggle to survive! So to his eyes, men were no different than the mutated lifeforms. So killing a man to him was just like killing a mutated lifeform!

Frowning, Ye Chong waved his hand and interrupted the strategist's buttering up session, he threatened, "No more of this complimentary nonsense from now on."

“So W-i-l-l-o-w. Tell me, what is your actual name?”

“It would be Bai Linan” With respect, he answered sincerely.

## Chapter 41: At His Master's Service

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Bai Linan finally further understood about his new master's temperament. The cold, unsmiling youth before him seemed to be dazed much of the time. He preferred swift actions and down-to-earth approaches over flattery or candied words. He never expressed outright disdain at them, but Bai Linan could unmistakably notice his impatience with those kinds of words! That's right, impatience! As for rank distinctions, his master was indifferent to them, but Bai Linan would not dare to be disrespectful!

What a strange person!

However, Bai Linan was astute. Once he knew about Ye Chong's preferences, he adjusted accordingly and changed his sycophantic ways of the past. He performed his duties efficiently and appropriately. Ye Chong, being naive, gradually realized that the man was actually not bad! If Mr One-eye was still alive and saw Bai Linan all prim and proper, he might just lose his last eyeball to shock!

Bai Linan spoke respectfully, "Sir, they should be heading towards Scarlet Star Shoal. They will not expect us to pass through the asteroid belt and head for Reno." Bai Linan now held great admiration towards Ye Chong, for he was always practicing on maneuvering the starship these past few days, and his painstaking effort far surpassed Bai Linan's expectations. To him, Ye Chong's training was akin to self torture!

This level of training was normal to Ye Chong. Since there was no one around to teach him, he would have to learn by himself. He had no choice but to learn the same way he did with mechs, but the results were remarkable, and his skills in maneuvering the starship greatly improved!

Since he witnessed Ye Chong's fluency in maneuvering, Bai

Linan was confident enough to propose this daring plan, and Ye Chong agreed that it was a good idea. With that, the pursuing pirates figured that Ye Chong would be aiming for the Scarlet Star Shoal, thinking that they would need to recharge energy and replenish supplies there. With a direction, the pirates went forth chasing in a frenzy, while requesting assistance from any pirate connections they have near Scarlet Star Shoal.

The Red Beard's Owl's crew leader was killed despite layers of security, and news of losing their starship spread like wildfire throughout the pirate community! Many travelled to Scarlet Star Shoal to see the mysterious person who single-handedly murdered the infamous captain of Red Beard's Owl and even escaped with their vessel.

According to Red Beard's Owl's third-in-command, Iron, he saw with his own eyes that Mr One-eye had exchanged two moves with the assassin, and was killed by the third move! With that, the mysterious assassin's fame skyrocketed, and all were hooked with curiosity, for Mr One-eye was a master in both mech piloting and unarmed combat, and boasted a high reputation amongst the pirates. Since he was eliminated with three strikes, how could that not be shocking?

If one had such an exceptional assassin in one's crew, the others would almost certainly be reluctant to provoke one's pirate crew. This was the mindset of the captains from many pirate crews - they immediately rushed for Scarlet Star Shoal, hoping to greatly benefit from this uproar!

While everyone was in a frenzy for Ye Chong, the man himself took Bai Linan's advice and headed straight into the asteroid belt midway journeying to Scarlet Star Shoal!

Bai Linan firmly believed that he would never again go within ten kilometers of an asteroid belt! Heavens, this was a nightmare! When you see weird-shaped rock fragments slowly enlarging before your eyes, closing in and whizzing past you, only personal

experience could make you truly appreciate the tension. Bai Linan's fragile nerves and heart heavily suffered, and when he saw Ye Chong's face red with excitement, he could only think of one thing - why did he ever come up with such a damning idea?

The vessel of the previously notorious Red Beard's Owl was magnificent and mighty, but after thorough treatment from the raining debris of rock fragments, it was now littered with holes, and looked terribly ugly! If Tiezi were to see it in front of him, he might not have recognized the vessel that he had personally modified under the orders of the late captain!

The starship's performance was also way beyond Ye Chong's expectations. If it were a normal starship, it would be out of service after the "painful" trip through the rocks. And while the pirate ship's exterior was now all scratched up from the impacts, the interior structure was completely undamaged.

When the starship left the asteroid belt safely, Bai Linan could not bear it anymore and plopped on the carpet, with his body sweating all over! On the other hand, Ye Chong seemed calm as ever, even reluctantly casting a few glances back at the asteroid belt. His expression was noticed by the heavily panting Bai Linan, who had the sudden urge to just abandon ship!

Fortunately, Ye Chong did not turn the starship back, but continued along the trajectory plotted on the space chart, heading towards the supply point on Reno. This made the anxious Bai Linan breathe a huge sigh of relief!

"Sir, we've arrived on Reno, where to next?" Bai Linan asked.

Ye Chong shook his head and asked back, "I'm not familiar with the local territory, where do you think we should go?"

Bai Linan considered for a moment. "Sir, news of you killing Mr One-eye must have spread around, I'm afraid many big players would be waiting for you to show yourself!"

Ye Chong was astonished “Waiting for me to show myself? For what?”

Bai Linan smiled wryly. “Sir, who would not want to recruit someone capable like you? I should tell you that once you announce yourself to the world, they would swarm up to you and do almost anything to get you onboard!”

Ye Chong humphed coldly; his gaze became focused and he went quiet. He took out his dagger and gently tested the sharp edges.

Bai Linan felt a chill down his spine, and hoped that the pirates would act sensibly, or else... Bai Linan dared not to continue the thought!

Ye Chong considered for a moment. He then removed his jacket, took off the black-striped yellow shirt that Bai Linan wore earlier and returned it to him. “You must take care of yourself!”

Bai Linan felt warmth blossoming in him, and tears nearly escaped his eyes. Ye Chong’s lightly delivered concern won much gratitude from Bai Linan. Even Mr One-eye, who treated him the best amongst the crew, did not care for his life. If Mr One-eye knew he had a mesh vest, the captain would surely take it away from him by any means necessary; he would never offer one for Bai Linan instead! All these years, he had grown used to being a lackey, with no one concerned with his life or death. If not for his ability to craft out plans for Mr One-eye, he would surely have been left to die of starvation on some deserted wasteland! Thanks to his efforts in those days, he finally became Red Beard's Owl’s second-in-command. It may seem glorifying, but those days were hard. The captain ordered him around from above, the crew disdained him from below, and Iron treated him like an enemy. He had not met a single soul who cared about his safety!

Bai Linan stared at the protective mesh vest in his hands with mixed feelings. Suddenly, his eyes glowed with realization, and spoke eagerly, “Sir, I know where we’re heading!”

# Chapter 42: Something for Everyone On Reno

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“Black Cove?” Ye Chong muttered, “What a strange name!”

Bai Linan excitedly explained, “Yes, Black Cove, Sir. I got my mesh vest there. No one would dare to make a move there. Once we enter Black Cove, it’ll be safe! Over there...”

Ye Chong was indifferent. “We’ll do as you say!” With that, he turned and left, leaving behind Bai Linan, stupefied, as he was just about to start a lengthy speech on the spot.

Ye Chong sat in a corner, deep in thought. He reflected on his actions these past few days, as was his usual practice. On the trash planet, after every battle, he would carefully dissect the results and identify his mistakes, the mutants’ habitual activities and their special behaviors. He had to think about these matters, and this was the main reason he could easily hunt powerful mutants every time with success. After Mu Shang’s arrival, the mech had strongly encouraged this habit, and even made it a daily commitment for Ye Chong!

During his ambush on Mr One-eye, he was still too hasty, and not sufficiently composed. If he had been more level-headed, he could have escaped before the pirates could react, and would not be in a passive position. His unfamiliarity with the outside world was his greatest weakness, but this was not something he could make up for in a short time.

“The asteroid belt was the best natural training ground for practicing mech piloting. Ah, I could also do a little shooting practice on the side. That’s something to consider for the future.”

Ye Chong thought of Mu out of a sudden. He called for him a few times in his mind, but Mu did not respond, just like before. Ye Chong was dejected, and yearned for his old life on the trash planet

despite himself being stronger now. While the planet was practically a wasteland, he and Mu could joke around all day, free of worries. Life there was monotonous, but nevertheless satisfying. Ever since Ye Chong left the trash planet, he had not laughed as much as he had in one day on his old home planet. As for unfamiliar things around him, Ye Chong always felt a dangerous undertone from them, and this made him extra cautious in dealing with everyday matters, including what most people thought were normal routines!

The environment out here was complicated, filled with variables that far outstrip the trash planet's!

Ye Chong yearned to leave the trash planet, but now that he had succeeded, he was without Mu's company, and that made him feel like something was missing.

At Reno's spaceport, workers stared dumbstruck at the starship that seemed like it could collapse at any time from its damages - if one could still call it a starship. Even the most senior worker shook his head despite himself being experienced, and spoke to the young lad next to him, "I've been at this for over fifty years, and never have I seen such a miserable-looking ship. Tsk tsk, I'm afraid even the junkyard wouldn't pay for it, it's a miracle they could even get here! Tell them we're not fixing this ship!"

The strange thing was, the other party did not ask for repairs, but only to recharge!

Ye Chong and Bai Linan exited the ship, and those around the pair oddly stared at them. The pair, however, was unfazed. Ye Chong did not care for them, for he was not involved with them. Once he found that they were not particularly threatening, he did not pay any attention to them. As for Bai Linan, he was, at any rate, the Red Beard's Owl's second-in-command, and these men were not worth his attention. As such, he ignored the stares they were receiving.



Reno was a planetoid, and looked the way it was now after years of construction and modifications. It was situated along the only way to Black Cove, and since visitors to Black Cove had gradually increased, Reno flourished as well.

Bai Linan, who was familiar with the area, took on the role of a guide, and began explaining to Ye Chong, “Reno is actually a supply station, the last one before one enters Black Cove. That’s why a lot of people heading for Black Cove will stop by here for provisions. Hmm, perhaps because it’s close to Black Cove, there are also plenty of Black Cove specialty products here, and traders who’re reluctant to take the risk of entering Black Cove will buy their goods here, though the price is much higher compared to those in Black Cove!”

Skyscrapers extended beyond the clouds. Flying machines of all sorts whizzed back and forth in the sky. People adorned with various colourful outfits strolled along the streets. The wide avenue was only occupied by a few groups of pedestrians. Numerous shops projecting holographic advertisements lined the roads. Ye Chong looked at his first ever holographic advertisement, showing a semi-transparent lady of extraordinary beauty. She had a flawless face, devilishly sexy body curves and an alluring voice - the combination was breathtaking. Her every move teased the heart, and her soft, wet cherry lips formed words that sounded like music from the heavens, enough to make most people consider buying the advertised product at once!

Of course, that was for most people, like Bai Linan! Bai Linan was entranced by the holographic advertisement, almost drooling at the voluptuous lady!

However, for someone like Ye Chong, who had never dealt with the opposite sex, developing a standard to differentiate between the beautiful and the ugly would be an arduous task!

Ye Chong evaluated from the perspective of combat practicality. Her legs were too slim, unable to provide enough strength. Her

hands had delicate skin, signs of weakness in unarmed combat. Her breasts were large but not muscular, not only lacking in strength but also definitely a burden for movement. Her hair was too long and would easily be tangled by something during combat, and that was very dangerous! Ye Chong could not help but shake his head. The only thing that impressed him was her thin waist - Ye Chong had no doubts that it would be very flexible!

The result of his evaluation was thus - extremely poor!

Bai Linan was still watching the advertisement with lecherous eyes and muttering to himself, "That's my dream girl, the most perfect woman in the world, ah, Feng Su, my dearest, when did she become the spokesperson for this product? What? How could I have not bought it? No, this... This is not acceptable for a loyal fan like me, I must support her till the end!"

Bai Linan warmed up to the idea and slipped into the store. After a moment, he exited with quite a few things in his hands. The storekeeper sent him off with a wide grin.

Ye Chong pointed at the stuff that Bai Linan was holding. "What are these?"

The distracted Bai Linan sobered up and studied them intently. His face instantly contorted - they're... they're all female products!

The two did not notice a pair of knavish eyes observing from around the corner.

"Did you really see them clearly?" A fearsome looking muscular man in his middle age asked in a low voice.

"Boss, do you still not believe the eyes of your servant? I've seen Bai Linan more than a few times, can't be mistaken!" The one who answered was a short fellow with unscrupulous eyes, obviously a cunning person.

"Didn't Red Beard's Owl's third-in-command, Iron said that Bai Linan is dead? Why would he be here now?" The middle-aged man

was perplexed.

“This servant is also puzzled, isn’t he already dead? Iron would not speak lightly of something like this, but I really did see Bai Linan! Oh, right, there’s also someone with him!” The shorter man recalled.

“What?” The muscular man trembled in realization, and asked urgently, “You said someone’s with him?”

“Yes, he’s very young, and his looks are average, except that his expression is as though someone owes him money or something. Bai Linan seems to be very respectful to him!”

The middle-aged man spoke slowly, “He must be the one everyone is talking about now - Mr One-eye’s assassin.”

“What?” The little man was shocked. “Isn’t he headed for Scarlet Star Shoal?”

“If I had guessed correctly, he must have travelled through the asteroid belt to get here. Smart move, hehe, who would have thought that everyone would be fooled by him! Excellent, excellent! If someone like this could work for me...” The middle-aged man paced about the room, his heart greatly enticed!

“Boss, what do you think we should do?”

His superior considered for some time, and made his decision. “Keep your eyes on him at all times, but remember, do not alarm him. Heehee, what a wonderful opportunity, we must plan this out carefully!”

## Chapter 43: Gold Wheat

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Once he left the boss's study, the little man scanned around discretely, and once he was sure no one was around, he quickly left through the back door.

The little man walked on and on, his surroundings became more and more secluded. The man did not once look back in his journey, and he looked nervous. His eyes constantly darted here and there. When he saw no one following him, he dashed into an alley.

“What did you say?” A black-faced burly man stood up as he spoke. His smooth, bald head shined conspicuously under the lighting.

“Elder Bei, there's no mistaking it, I saw Bai Linan with my own eyes, I wouldn't mistakingly recognize him! He is at Reno right now. If you don't believe it, send a few of your lackeys out to scout, they'll surely find them! As our elder said, they must have travelled through the asteroid belt, diverging from their route to Red Star Coast!” The little man replied with respect.

Just then, a lackey walked in and went whispered a few words into the ears of the black-faced man. The black-faced man's expression turned to joy upon hearing those whispers.

“Little Monkey, well done!” The black-faced man nodded with approval, and gave a meaningful glance to another lackey standing straight by his side. The lackey produced a card from his pocket and handed it to Little Monkey. “Well, Little Monkey, you must work hard from now on, don't worry, you'll get your share of rewards!”

Little Monkey nodded profusely, his eyes gleaming with desire at the card, as he accepted it carefully with both hands.

Elder Bei gave a wave of his hand, and Little Monkey tactfully left the room.

Once he was gone, Elder Bei leaned back and laughed to himself. “Haha, the Heavens do smile upon old me. My elder brother had gone to Scarlet Star Shoal for the assassin, but who would have thought I would gain an unexpected opportunity here at home. Tell our men to prepare themselves, I would also like to meet the one who killed Mr One-eye in three blows. Bring guns, all of you! Hehe, however fast he may be, can he outrun bullets?” Elder Bei groomed and stroked his bald head.

One of the lackeys was unsure. “Second Elder, do you think we should refer to the leader about this?”

Elder Bei scolded loudly, “Refer my a\*\*, if we wait for that, those two would be long gone! Once we capture them, we’ll give the leader a surprise, haha. Now, don’t just stand there, go get ready!”

Ye Chong and Bai Linan were leisurely strolling in Reno. By now, Bai Linan was getting a little depressed - where in the whole wide universe did his master come from? He knew almost nothing, and would ask about certain things. Initially, Bai Linan enthusiastically explained to him, but the questions became too much. Usually Bai Linan’s explanation would spawn many more questions, and the questions were weird and outlandish, leaving Bai Linan uncertain of how to go about those subjects.

“Who would have thought I would serve a master like this? What bad luck,” Bai Linan rolled his eyes at the sky. What infuriated him the most was his master’s spouting nonsense about his idol, Feng Su – saying her legs were too thin, her skin was too soft and so on. Heavens, did those words come from a human? Bai Linan felt helpless against his situation!

Suddenly, there was a commotion ahead, and he saw an intimidating gang of burly men coming straight towards them.

Ye Chong noticed, and immediately summoned his mech.

The mechs that Ye Chong obtained from the commercial starships were prepared by Oak Leaves after years of hard work for

use in case of emergency. They were all above average, and quite a few of them were expert level mechs, like the one Ye Chong was now summoning – the humanoid Gold Wheat!

While onboard the ship, Bai Linan had seen Ye Chong empty out a pile of dimension keystones from his waist bag, and he stared at them with bulging eyes, pointing at Ye Chong speechlessly. Was this guy an arms dealer?

Ye Chong learnt from his lessons, about running the initialization settings for a few mechs that were either expert level or had unique skills. A bit of early work would prepare him to face dangers ahead without panicking, and allow him to fully engage in battle swiftly. On the battleground, a second could determine life and death!

In Bai Linan's eyes, his new master kept changing one mech after another. Was he trying to do a mech showcase? Bai Linan was perplexed.

Once he understood Ye Chong's intentions, Bai Linan was astounded. Preparing so many mechs just in case of an emergency? He had never even seen anyone equipped with more than two mechs at a time! Ye Chong had set up five expert level mechs, and three special mechs! This, this was practically a moving mech warehouse! Bai Linan watched Ye Chong wear the dimension keystones on his hands with disbelief! If he knew Ye Chong already had a Sand Scorpio on him and Mu Shang hanging on his neck, what would his expression look like...

Since there were too many dimension keystones, they were made to look like accessories for easy carry. Ye Chong wore four rings, two wristlets, and even a keystone shaped as an eardrop. Bai Linan watched as Ye Chong wore the eardrop-shaped keystone on his left ear without hesitation, and was thoroughly shocked. When he recovered, he could not help but started laughing incredulously at Ye Chong's appearance.

Ye Chong did not mind it at all! Ugly? Did it matter? If it could save his life, Ye Chong will accept any degree of ugliness! Ye Chong did not care for Bai Linan's view. The only thing Ye Chong felt unfitting was having the rings on his fingers that would affect his hands' agility and sense!

Ye Chong summoned the Gold Wheat mech from his left middle finger the moment he felt danger.

Gold Wheat was thoroughly covered with a bright, golden hue. It was like a God that descended from the Heavens, all mighty and strong. But this was the feature Ye Chong was most dissatisfied with. Such glamour would basically mean shifting attention away from itself would be impossible. If only it was a greenish grey or a dull turquoise, or even a brownish yellow – any of them would be better than this.

However, Ye Chong was satisfied with the mech's overall design. The hull was streamlined, minimizing air resistance, and the double-layered armor was light and strong. Its main weapon was the ultra-frequency (UF) magnetic sword – a magnetic sword's performance was graded based on its size and resonant frequency, and an UF magnetic sword's power was astonishing. Its UF vibrations could shatter a mech's metal armor into pieces in an instant. It lacked the eye-catching glow of a laser sword, and so was not generally well received, but Ye Chong was quite satisfied with this feature.

Unlike most battle mechs, the Gold Wheat was not equipped with a shield, instead it had two defence hooks and a small armguard on its right arm. Speed, which Ye Chong had always prioritized, was also something the mech was well equipped for. Its Prism engine could support powerful movements, and up to eight auxiliary engines allowed great flexibility in maneuvering. However, the mech was completely inadequate in terms of long range shooting - it only had one concealed gun chamber on its left arm, which housed a meagre 5k grade Lux Blaster - too shabby for a mech like

this!

However, to Ye Chong, this battle mech was undoubtedly his most familiar and favourite type! Hence, when he first sensed danger, Ye Chong immediately thought of it!

Gold Wheat's bionic eyes shone with a golden glare, eyeing coolly at the ill-intent filled gang.



# Chapter 44: No Rules At All

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Best to launch a preemptive strike! A preemptive strike implied a greater chance of controlling the flow of battle. In a battle of life and death, whatever courtesy and chivalry present were all obsolete! Ye Chong was also devoid of such manners. While he did not know if this gang were looking for trouble with him, it was undeniable that he felt an underlying danger in their presence. Ye Chong's default reaction was to curb the menace before it began to pose a threat to himself against such underlying danger. This time, he followed his routine without a second to waste!

The men spread out into an arch, obviously hoping to surround Ye Chong. If Ye Chong could not have notice such an obvious tactic, he would have sign his own death warrant. Ye Chong had witnessed Oak Leaves' disciplined formation and the unique wolf pack formation of Red Owl's Beard. Thus, the current disorganized formation was, in his eyes, absolutely horrendous!

Ye Chong lifted his left arm, aimed it towards the gang and took a shot!

When the gang saw Ye Chong deploying his mech even before they even reached him, they were all stunned. Some of the more seasoned men slowed down their pace and silently shifted to the rear of the group.

They never imagined that with so many of them against one opponent, the other party would strike first.

The 5k grade heat ray gun, while being a little shabby for Gold Wheat, was still a terrifying weapon against lightly shielded opponents! A heat ray, thick as one's wrist, struck true at the frontmost man of the gang.

The scorching heat ray caused a perimeter of air turbulence surrounding its trajectory! The frontmost man's lower left arm completely evaporated. The wound, red from fresh blood, quickly

turned maroon, and finally a burnt yellow; the gushing blood dried up in an instant like water sprinkled on desert sand. The heat ray did not seem to weaken after the first hit. It blasted at the chest of its second casualty, going through the body completely. Through the perfect wrist-sized wound, one could see a charred patch on the underbelly of the person behind him. All this happened before the agonizing shriek sounded by the first victim, followed by the second and the third!

The disaster before them shook everyone to their core, and all of them tried to stay as far as possible from the three victims. The crowd was in chaos.

Bai Linan gasped in astonishment, seeing the use of a mech weapon against someone without any mech equipped. He finally realized something - compared to this master, the pirates were merciful! Bai Linan was sharp - when he saw Ye Chong fired, he immediately scurried for cover behind him.

Ye Chong chillingly smiled in the pilot's cabin as Gold Wheat's ray gun continued blasting randomly at the gang. It went without saying that Ye Chong's shooting skills were terrible. Although he had practiced shooting at the NR Training Center, he had never practiced shooting in real life. Hence, while he still had recollections of shooting, his body could not keep up with the movement. In this dense crowd, with people everywhere, it would be harder to miss than to hit, but Ye Chong still managed to fire a few inconsequential rounds! Ye Chong felt deeply ashamed despite knowing this.

Second Elder Bei's bald head was covered with sweat. He did not expect the fellow before him to be so ruthless, shooting without so much as a question! He had planned to catch the fellow alive, for a dead man would be useless! The men with him had only heat ray guns of 8k grade, as the rays shooting Gold Wheat's body had no effect! Without at least a 10k grade weapon, it would be impossible to do the mech harm! Second Elder Bei urgently commanded, "Put

on your mech now! Right now!”

Upon hearing his voice, the subordinates around him finally came back to their senses and deployed their mechs.

However, since they were standing too close to one another, many ignored their surroundings and thought of only sheltering within their mechs as soon as possible and staying out of the ray gun's path. The immediate result was that the deployed mechs, with their huge sizes, crammed the area even further. The situation became chaotic, and some people were even stomped to death by the deployed mechs!

Second Elder Bei hopelessly watched at the situation. He covered his face, unable to bear witness to the disaster, crying dry tears.

“There's a good opportunity!” Ye Chong unsheathed his UF magnetic sword, as his left arm wielded the defensive barb, and rushed head on like a thunderbolt into the chaotic mess. The best metaphor for the current situation would be - like a fierce tiger invading a flock of lambs! Compared to the defensive barbs in Ye Chong's left hand, the UF magnetic sword in his right was definitely an edged weapon used to reap human lives! He specifically aimed for the mechs' weak points, and the UF vibration due to the magnetic sword's hit often led to the targeted mech crumbling into pieces. Fragments and broken limbs flew away at high speeds, and many who did not deploy their mech in time lost their lives to these flying fragments.

What would happen when an UF magnetic sword directly hit a human body? The human body could not withstand vibrations at such a high frequency - once hit, beginning from the point of contact, the body would be ripped apart into numerous pieces! Body pieces flew everywhere! Red flowers of blood bloomed in numbers!

Compared to this, the men who died under the parrying spear were far luckier. The sharp, chilling, gleaming edge of the weapon

was fatal in its every strike. It moved like lightning and never missed, its victims often dying on the spot!

Second Elder Bei did not manage to escape the plight. His shiny bald head rolled and revolved into a faraway corner, as his furious eyes were unwilling to close!

Bai Linan shivered all over. This was a massacre, and the victims were from the larger party! This scene, full of bloodshed, was one he would never forget in his life! As he watched Ye Chong standing in the blood puddles, Bai Linan could not bear it anymore and puked violently!

The scene was also unforgettable for the two spectators who had watched the whole incident from afar.

Little Monkey looked very pale, and muttered, “Is that guy really human?”

The middle-aged burly man beside him was also shocked. “How ruthless! Who would have thought he would attack without knowing the opponent’s intent? His methods are too merciless! This is not someone we should meddle with!”

Little Monkey levelled his chest, rejoicing. “Boss, luckily we had Second Elder Bei to test the waters, if not...”

The middle-aged man nodded in agreement. “Second Elder Bei is far worse than First Elder Bei! He’s ambitious and likes to impress others, but he was all talk and no substance. His leadership was also a failure. It’s no wonder First Elder Bei did not hand Reno over to him all this while. If First Elder Bei were here, things would be different! But this guy here is also quite unpredictable, doing things his own way!”

Little Monkey said, “That’s right, this man has no rules at all!”

The middle-aged man warned, “It’s people like these that are the scariest, you musn’t mess with him in future!”

Little Monkey nodded, still in shock. “Understood. I would

rather die than mess with him! Boss, Reno Society has taken a heavy blow this time!”

The middle-aged man shook his head. “Most of Reno Society’s core personnel had followed First Elder Bei to the Red Star Coast. The people here are only their intermediate and lower tier members. However, even if it’s so, it would be enough for them to deal with! Usually we can’t do anything to them, but now, hehehe...” A knavish look passed in his eyes.

Little Monkey spoke excitedly, “Boss, should we get ready to work for Reno Society?”

The middle-aged man shook his head again. “This is not urgent! Little Monkey, you did well this time. First Elder Bei will surely investigate to find out who informed Second Elder Bei of the target. You should go play around somewhere, lie low until the dust settles, then come back. The money is already transferred to your card!”

“Yes!” Little Monkey obeyed respectfully.

## Chapter 45: The Jinxed Man

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News of Reno's number two murder spread posthaste to Scarlet Star Shoal. Reno's leader, First Elder Bei, who was also Second Elder Bei's brother, vomited blood on the spot, and made a vow before everyone that he would definitely seek revenge for his younger brother! Ye Chong's strong capabilities and his ruthless methods were greatly exaggerated by the masses. He was described as Asura's reincarnation, or a killing machine. In the meantime, all the local linchpins were reconsidering whether they could afford the costs of drawing Ye Chong to their side.

Was all this relevant to Ye Chong? At least Ye Chong himself believed it to be none of his business!

Ye Chong was now practicing his shooting skills. Shooting in combat was definitely a very effective mean, involving a variety of skills. Ye Chong could not help but blush at his missed shots last time! Before this, he lacked the right conditions; but now that they were available, he would surely not pass them up!

Bai Linan sat and yawned while he watched Ye Chong's practice from afar in disinterest! However, he dared not stay more than fifty meters away from Ye Chong for now. The bloody scene from a few days ago was still fresh in his memory. No doubt many would keep their eyes on them from now on. Bai Linan scanned the surroundings, and found that the few people who were stealthily observing them a few days ago were no longer in sight.

Bai Linan was pleased and smiled despite the current situation, for this was his doing. A few days ago, he realized that a few people were secretly watching them in the vicinity, and reported this to Ye Chong. He thought Ye Chong would definitely put on his mech, wield his magnetic sword and charge howling towards them, cutting them to pieces! He did not expect Ye Chong to be indifferent - his master believed that they had nothing against him, and so they can watch if they want to! With that, Ye Chong

continued practicing! This left the expectant Bai Linan standing in astonishment.

The spies realized that Ye Chong did not care for their presence, and began to act more aggressively, throwing all manners of stealth out of the window!

However, Bai Linan was no amateur - after years of leading as a general amongst the pirates, how could he lack the means to do something about them? Bai Linan put on a serious demeanour and explained that spying was preparatory work for an imminent attack, meant to identify the enemy's weakness and so forth, and so on! This made Ye Chong immediately thought of his time as a hunter, observing the mutants' natural behavior to devise a countermeasure against them.

Ye Chong realized the severity of things, and eyed the observers with a cold stare! Bai Linan knew that his words had achieved the desired effect, and so he kept his silence.

Against the enemy, there will be no mercy!

Gold Wheat's parrying spear, held in Ye Chong's hands, looked like a long spear. Bai Linan had never seen a mech weapon wielded by one's bare hands, but this weapon looked as light as a feather in Ye Chong's hands, and the scene was quite peculiar.

Ye Chong slowly stepped towards the few observers.

Those few people must have not seen the incident a few days ago, as they greeted Ye Chong with a cheeky grin.

With a twist of his wrist, the flexible parrying spear drew an arc of light, and those people clutched their throats in agony, blood still flowing through their fingers, and their eyes were filled with disbelief. A few seconds later, they all fell to the ground.

Ye Chong could not be bothered with the bodies, and continued his training!

Bai Linan's offense against them was not personal, but was due to

his understanding of their ways from his days as a pirate. They would resort to any means necessary, and if they found a weakness, they would find some way of using it against you. Bai Linan was also an expert in such things. However, now that almost everyone knew that he was with Ye Chong, and as long as Ye Chong was doing fine, he would be left alone; but if Ye Chong was to fall to some misfortune, he would definitely follow suit!

Bai Linan was afraid of more mishaps occurring in Reno, and desperately advised Ye Chong to head for Black Cove. After a great deal of words were dispensed, Ye Chong finally agreed reluctantly, since his shootings skills had slightly improved. It was truly a mystery - Ye Chong had remarkable talent in piloting mechs for combat, such that even Mu would occasionally express his marvel at it; but when it came to shooting, while Ye Chong may not shoot clumsily, he was only average in this aspect.

Following Bai Linan's suggestions, Ye Chong sold all his average level mechs in exchange for ready Zuan. The shopkeeper saw Ye Chong emptying his bag to produce a heap of dimension keystones, and was immediately stunned! No matter in which galaxy, selling mechs without license would mean the death sentence! While this was Reno, and the government's laws had yet to extend to the area, this was still the first time the shopkeeper saw someone smuggling mechs as an individual, and offering all white mechs.

Ye Chong and Bai Linan left the shop with a big bag of gold Zuan. Ye Chong picked up a piece of gold Zuan and inspected it - this was his first time seeing the real deal. The gold Zuan was slightly larger than his fingernail. It was in a transparent yellowish gold color and rhombus-shaped, with many rich and complex patterns inscribed on its surface. The rims were rounded for the two to three millimeters thick Zuan, and the material was extremely tough. Ye Chong gave it all he had and he could just only break the Zuan in two! "Tough material indeed," Ye Chong assessed the Zuan internally!



Bai Linan gaped widely, his eyes completely dull. How could someone break a gold Zuan with brute force? The gold Zuan was said to be able to last five centuries without taking damage, and from his extensive experience, these were definitely not fake currency!

Following that thought, he immediately felt his heart ache - Heavens, that was one gold Zuan, now losing half its value for no reason! A damaged Zuan can only be redeemed for half its value at the bank!

“This big shot’s origin is really a mystery, he even lacked an identity card, is there still a place in this world where people don’t carry identity cards?” The shopkeeper from earlier was nervous from the trade. He did not think there could still be someone in this world without an identity card. The shopkeeper had always charged his customers with the swipe of a card, and did not have so much gold Zuan with him. He had to get someone to withdraw the large sum of Zuan from the bank. Gold Zuan was too high in value, and people rarely keep them in person and use them as circulation currency for business.

Extraordinary strength, a callous nature, and a mysterious origin!

What an enigmatic master!

The deft Bai Linan picked up the broken halves of the golden Zuan piece that Ye Chong carelessly discarded on the ground. He meticulously brushed away the dust on it and carefully placed it in his pocket.

The two travelled through a great part of Reno. Of course, the journey was not without Bai Linan’s incessant speeches, indicative of his way with words. Ye Chong’s expression did not change throughout his speeches, and one would not know if he absorbed any of his words!

Under Bai Linan’s guidance, Ye Chong bought many energy cells.

According to Bai Linan, the road to Black Cove was perilous and impenetrable to starships. One would have to pilot a mech to traverse the way, and extra energy cells can prepare one for unexpected incidents. This fitted Ye Chong's style - with regards to preparation, Ye Chong had always chosen to do more instead of less!

At the same time, news of the living jinx's imminent leave from Reno had travelled far and wide. Those who caught wind of the news could not help but heave a sigh of relief! The God of plagues was finally leaving! No one dared walk the street where Ye Chong last slaughtered members of Reno Society. The foul smell of blood still hung in the air despite repeated washings of the area. They also heard that someone dared to spy on his behavior, and this startled all the local linchpins. They immediately went to the particular linchpin involved and advised him to stop his dangerous actions, and threatened to join hands and eliminate him should he refuse! It was then when someone came to report that the spies were all killed!

Everyone was only too eager to see the living jinx leave Reno as soon as possible, but this raised another question in their hearts - why was he heading towards Black Cove?

Upon listening to Bai Linan's analysis, Ye Chong felt reluctant to leave the starship behind - it had such good specs, and most importantly, it had quite a solid build! It was a waste to discard it, and while it may look miserable, that was not something Ye Chong minded about!

After preparing themselves, the duo was now ready to leave for Black Cove!

## Chapter 46: Into the Black Cove

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Since Bai Linan didn't know how to pilot a mech on his own, he had rode with Ye Chong. The cabin that offered limited accommodation became overloaded when there was more than one man inside. Foolish Bai insisted on keeping the ladies product he bought from a spokesperson who happened to be none other than Feng Su much to Ye Chong's annoyance; as if the cabin was already not narrow enough for starters. Movements were limited with Bai's products everywhere which affected Ye Chong's piloting inputs as well. Without a second thought, Ye Chong winded down the window and lobbed every junk out, ignoring Bai Linan who was weeping in the corner.

He inserted a chip that contained the calculated route to the Black Cove and displayed marked route on the galaxy map. The chip was a purchase from an undistinguished pawn shop by Bai Linan with 12 gold zuan. Apparently the broker of the pawn shop specifies in offering updated routes to the Black Cove.

The mech Ye Chong was piloting zoomed into the space, travelling in auto-pilot mode.

After travelling for about 38 hours, they finally arrived at the protected area in the Black Cove – the Elma Zone. Ye Chong was glad that Bai Linan reminded him to bring extra supply of batteries, if not they wouldn't be able to travel this far.

The galactic environment of the Black Cove was rather unique as it was surrounded by a large area of asteroid belt and the asteroids in the Elma Zone were not stationary; they were actively moving about. In addition, there were countless of asteroid whirls lurking among them. If one were to get sucked in accidentally, one would be shredded into a million pieces within a second by the overwhelming force in its own orbit. It is almost like a huge meat mincer functioning at high speed. Travelers were rare in Elma Zone for a reason.

Ye Chong had already switched back to manual piloting and attempted to make it through the belt. A glance at the belts of asteroids that densely floated by, a track of free orbit about 100 meters broad could barely be discerned. It was only then that Ye Chong was convinced by the fact mentioned by Bai Linan; spacecraft of any kind could never make it to the Black Cove. It was justifiable with the restricted space for movement due to the mass of asteroids. No spacecraft would be able to travel through this without a scratch or two.

One brief second his mind wandered off elsewhere and an asteroid about two meters in diameter flew by in his face. He froze in fear and Bai Linan almost chickened out of the excursion. Ye Chong could not afford to build castles in the air so he drove on with full focus. In fact, quite a large amount of asteroids on the orbit had been cleared with only a few finer ones that would occasionally hurl pass; talk about jump-scares in the galaxy.

Out of the blue, a small group of pilots in their onyx black mech-humanoids appeared! Ye Chong felt his throat tightened as his face drained immediately.

Their piloting skills were brilliant! They flew in high speed, kicking the asteroids out of the orbit using their feet as they travelled. There were no changes in their direction and they didn't seem to be affected by the asteroid. The mech was like a giant blob of cannonball, the asteroids in his way were all cast aside and he wasn't hindered by those at all. Theoretically, if both parties were of vast difference in weight, this could happen. It was just like a brandishing hammer smashing away oncoming peas. The catch in this was the differences between that black mech and the asteroids were not many to begin with, yet the asteroids got shoved away while he continued his journey. It was amazing enough for Ye Chong.

Ye Chong was sure enough that he couldn't perform such skillful piloting at that moment. Flying at high speed in a belt of moving

rocks was not the issue for him but his traveling direction would be altered when he knocked away the oncoming asteroids; it was difficult to maintain it. It wasn't even a slight change but a major adjustment from his initially planned route!

The group was as fast as lightning and in a blink of an eye they disappeared into space. As they carried on, the asteroids on the orbit were all cleared up.

“Who are these people?” Ye Chong asked seriously.

Bai Linan replied, “I’m not really sure about that. Maybe they are the orbit cleaners or something. You know... the orbit here is not a stable one. It would be a real problem without them clearing up a path!”

Ye Chong knew he would not be getting much information from Bai Linan so he remained quiet, and his anticipation grew as they journeyed towards the Black Cove. He was having immense expectation of intensifying his strength, and witnessing the skills possessed by that black mech had just raised the bar for him! It was a skillset that was entirely different from the ones Mu had taught him, and nothing else could motivate him more than this!

The route was winding. He did his best to focus, but it was still thrilling for him. Imagine a rookie pilot maneuvering through such a route – that would be impossible! The pilot could never make it! It was an estimated short route yet Ye Chong took two hours in total just to travel through. Bai Linan glimpsed at the time and complimented uncontrollably, “Master has such amazing piloting skill! I came once with the Cyclops-dude last time and he took literally 6 hours just to make it through! Much more inferior compared to master’s skills!”

It was a space station they saw upon entry. It took the form of two gigantic rings connected to the same axis and from the center about five pipes of channels were extended three kilometers long bridging to the inner ring. The outer ring on the other hand was

wrapped over the inner ring, and both were working together. The diameter of the inner ring was about 15 kilometers long while the outer ring was shockingly 19 meters in diameter!

“This... is the outskirts of the Black Cove, namely the S.S. Zhi Lan.” Looking at how astounded Ye Chong was by the view, Bai Linan proudly introduced the place, “It seemed that it was named after one of the founders of the Black Cove – Mr. Yang Zhilan. The S.S. Zhi Lan is known to be grander in size compared to S.S. Hui Tan that was newly built in Fal galaxy last year.” He chuckled and continued, “Here, is what we called paradise. Anything you wanted, as long as you have enough bet, you can always bargain for one. Service... products... the merchants here would satisfy your every need. Service of course, includes that special kind of service...” Bai Linan let out a hearty laugh.

Ye Chong did not show much care about Bai Linan’s babbling. He carefully piloted his mech into the automatic parking walkway, but the gate was closed upon his arrival.

A few seconds later, the air pressure in the walkway was adjusted to the optimal level for breathing. Beep! The control system in the walkway notified Ye Chong that it was safe to exit from his mech. Ye Chong and Bai Linan climbed out of the mech and he kept it back into the alternate dimension as they proceeded to the gate. Click! The sensor at the door detected their presence and opened up as programmed.

Bai Linan made his way out first, followed by Ye Chong after a few moments of being skeptical. Ye Chong was on his toes as he scrutinized his surrounding while Bai Linan’s willowed face turned into a spark of vitality; he seemed charged.

The environment changed once they stepped out of the walkway. A modernistic lobby with a big hologram in the center surfaced. The walkway they exited from had a few more other walkways by the side; they spread to the surroundings in half circle. The hologram was separated into different windows with a tour guide

for the S.S. Zhi Lan, and the latest news reports of the area too.

Bai Linan gave a cautious reminder, “Master, if anything goes wrong in the Black Cove, never ever solve it with violence. The consequences would be deadly. The defense team here is outstanding!” Ye Chong seemed intrigued at trying it out and that sent chills to Bai’s spines. “Master, please! Please, don’t use your fist! You might be able to throw great punches but most fighters who showed disrespect like you had a bad time with the defense team here! They eventually got escorted out. What happened to them, nobody knows! But everyone was sure that, once you were taken away, you are never to be seen again!”

Bai Linan was sweating in fear.

Ye Chong couldn’t help but to inhibit his desire temporarily.

After wiping off his sweat, he told Ye Chong, “Master, I suggest we walk our ways separately!” Like a magician pulling out a rabbit from his hat, he took out 2 communicators and passed one to Ye Chong, “Master, I had set up my number inside. If there is anything, feel free to contact me through this, but nothing bad should happen. Oh yes! My master, you can’t really bargain here but you can have good deals. The merchants here have a good reputation, and they do not commit daylight robberies. Alright, that is all. Have a nice day, my master!” Bai Linan shoved a pouch of gold zuans into Ye Chong’s hands, “Ciao! Tata!” Before Ye Chong could say or ask anything, he scurried away in a jiffy!

He looked at the pouch in his hand, glanced around the place, and seeing Bai Linan fleeing the scene.

Man...

Ye Chong thought in bewilderment.

## Chapter 47: Masquerade

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Ye Chong was surprised at the sight of the crowd of pedestrians on the street. Considering how the Black Cove is located in the corner of the galaxy, and the hassle to get here, one would have expected it to have the least population, but it turned out to be the other way around. The interior of S.S. Zhi Lan was rather spacious so Ye Chong did not feel claustrophobic. Overwhelmed by curiosity, he could not stop examining every nook and cranny of that place – the same as he entered the virtual world the first time.

In the midst of the fun-filled exploration, there seemed to be a fiasco up front. He hastened his steps and joined the chaotic crowd. Apparently, an overweight man dressed exquisitely was arguing with an elderly. His oily face expressed anger and frustration while the brawny man by his side seemed like his personal bodyguard. He had a cocky look on his face as he pushed the elderly, and was pretty self-absorbed too. His actions were merely because his boss was enraged. The bodyguard wielded great strength. The poor elderly lost his balance and landed on his bottom.

The man was agitated and berated the bodyguard.

The elderly did not mutter a word. He just stood up and snickered while the man quickly forced a smile back. The elderly remained silent, and the man sweated profusely; his fleshy cheeks twitched over time as he continued to force a smile.

A rumbling sound of an engine could be heard out of the blue. “Who’s the one causing trouble here?”

Ye Chong shuddered as he did not sense the sneaky arrival right behind him. Imagine if the person were to assassinate Ye Chong – that would be a nasty one to deal with! This person is strong! Encountering such power minutes after his arrival, he definitely did not see this coming. He felt excited! Compared to the



electrifying adventure he had before, a field of strong opponents was much more preferable. The Black Cove sure is a better place for me!

He hardly encountered any formidable opponent ever since he left Trash Planet-12. Disregarding opponents of any kind, he still could tell there were flaws in them. A kind of fragility either in their physique, skills or mentality which was such a turn-off to Ye Chong's battle will. He only had a simple request –to become stronger. In his mindset, strength was the only factor to guarantee his life and determine his fate.

A man wearing a black mask stormed in. The mask was smooth in texture, and glowing in gentle linings. His facial features were mellow; the nose and lips were well-rounded while the eyes were decorated with intricate silver, giving off a dynamic visual. The mask exerted some kind of strange force that made people lower their gazes at the sight of it. The cloak that was as dark as night exuded a sense of mystery and unworldliness.

Sweat trickled down the man's forehead.

The man behind the mask was Johansson and he felt agitated at the commotion. How dare the people cause trouble while he was on duty!

Looking at the situation, Johansson deduced in his mind what probably had happened. He shot an icy glance at the man; a piercing gaze that sent shivers down the man's spine. He sweated extensively and fear was clearly plastered on his face which intensified afterwards.

Johansson held his hand up to stop the man from speaking as he was too lazy to interrogate or to even communicate with the man. He walked straight to the side of the wall and tapped a few buttons. A hologram display popped out of the wall, and replayed the incident.

"I'm impressed." The inhospitality in Johansson's voice was

eminent, “You people are actually brave enough to defy the law of zero violence in the Black Cove. So, do you want to come with me... or do you want a fight instead?”

The brawny bodyguard beside the man did not seem to care. His lips curved into a wry smile of disdain. The masked man before him seemed too petite to bring any harm; so frail it looked as if the masked guy could be sent flying with a punch. He was puzzled by his boss’ irrational fear of the masked man. What could an elderly and a puny masked man do?

Meanwhile, Ye Chong was cautiously watching the masked man. He could be considered as a dangerous individual judging by how he managed to sneak in without being noticed. He must have something up his sleeves! Ye Chong had a keen sense of hearing as well as his other senses. There was not a time where he failed to notice anyone coming close to him. His strength could not be justified through his frail physique, and lack of defined muscles. Men with such physique were able to throw great punches too, like Ye Chong himself!

Johansson sneered under his mask. The corners of his lips curled into a broad contemptuous smile.

Everyone was blinded by a sudden flash of light but only caught a glimpse of a dark shadow lurking near. The bodyguard held his abdomen whimpering, and his face distorted in pain. He could barely let out a cry. His expression twisted in agony while his body caved into the pain, and eventually he fainted and collapsed on the ground. He did not speak a word.

Ye Chong’s heart skipped a beat; flustered by what he had witnessed. I could be taken down anytime! That was the first time Ye Chong encountered someone who could travel as fast as him. He saw everything clearly, the whole sequence of action –the masked man sprinted to the front of the bodyguard, and sprung a kick right into the bodyguard. His leg was like a dagger drawn from its sheath. It felt like a mere tap on the man’s body as he

backed off like phantom after delivering the blow.

Ye Chong's back was already wet from the stream of cold sweats!

Johansson humph in dissatisfaction, and walked towards the bodyguard who had been taught his lesson of the day.

"Hold it!" A person shouted from the crowd.

Johansson's eyes discerned the one who shouted. He raised his eyebrows. Such an ordinary looking boy. Yet, he stood out like a sore thumb from the crowd. Like the big bad wolf in a group of sheep! A man from the crowd walked too close for comfort to the boy but he reflexively adjusted his body right away; just enough to avoid his attack! Johansson was taken aback by surprise of course. Such swiftness! He continued to observe the boy and felt astonished. The boy was actually in a much different stance than the others. He stood in a way which was easier for him to lunge into an attack when threatened while others in the crowd was standing with ease; this tiny detail set him apart from regular people.

The boy had a balanced physique. He did not have a set of bulky muscles anywhere. Johansson judged based on his experiences. He knew Ye Chong was not as weak as he appeared to be. In fact, he was as potent as Johansson himself. Johansson was well aware of the potential terror a boy like him could bring. Nevertheless, Johansson was confused. A body of his built requires a certain type of training which was not known by anybody else outside the Black Cove supposedly. If that was the case, how was it possible that a complete outsider possess a physique of such kind? Did he spy on their training process? Impossible! The coaching of this place is one-of-a-kind; there would not be a chance for outsiders like him to learn by just peeking! In fact, not only does it call for a special skillset, it also requires other supplementary acts to be taken. If not, it impossible to stop the muscles from enlarging!

The people around Ye Chong quickly distanced themselves from

him like he was Satan or something from the underworld. But this made it easy for Ye Chong to move.

Ye Chong took a deep breath and immediately grabbed the optimal rhythm for his breather.

Johansson's heart quivered and shifted his step gently a little to the left to face Ye Chong in the face.

Johansson made up his mind. By hook or by crook, this strange boy before him must be arrested and handed over to Instructor Hak. The instructor shall show special care to this boy; a session of detailed interrogation. We must know who this boy is and where he came from!

Ye Chong alarmingly stared at the masked man. The right leg of his which formerly right beside his left went backwards much more, about a distance of two feet, while his left knee bent way more! His feet that were placed side by side were now two feet apart on guard.

“So it was you I supposed? The one who spoke up.” Johansson asked coldly. His tone was glazed with ice; more hostile than when he spoke to the bodyguard.

Everyone in the crowd could sense how frigid the atmosphere had turned, as if time was frozen. The pressure exerted in space... they couldn't breathe!

# Chapter 48: Through the Looking Glass

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“Absolutely!” Ye Chong’s reply was loud and firm!

“Oh...” The cold wind blew as Johansson spoke indifferently, “So, you want to butt in?” The dark mask shone in polished black.

Ye Chong shook his head.

Johansson was perplexed for a second. That was unpredicted! He maintained a calm facade and asked softly, “I see. So... why did you speak up?”

“I...” Ye Chong halted for a moment thinking of a way to convey his feelings, but he lacked the experience of making deals with people. He decided to ditch the idea and spoke straightforwardly, “I want to learn battle techniques from you!”

That statement stupefied Johansson. Oh! Johansson turned joyful. This was such a good opportunity. While he was racking his head to think of a way to drag this boy all the way to Instructor Hak, the boy decided to offer himself. No force capture was needed it seemed. He suppressed his joy and spoke on as calmly as possible, “Very well. But you are required to undergo some examination. Follow me then, if you would!”

Johansson turned on his heels, and carried the bodyguard in his arm. He hurried away in a flash!

Ye Chong chased after the masked man without any hesitation!

The bodyguard was like a heavyweight dumbbell in Johansson’s hand, but he carried him with ease. As Ye Chong chased on his confidence started to extinguish. This is already my maximum speed... yet I can’t even overtake the masked man. Our distance remained the same when we left, and I can’t even close the gap between us. That wasn’t the only mood-killer – considering the masked man was actually lifting a 260 pound man, it would be blatantly justifiable that he just didn’t have the speed to even

compete the masked man. Clouded in negative thoughts, he grew disappointed of himself.

Speed, velocity, and anything that sets motion like lightning was always what Ye Chong had the most priority on as well as confidence. Back in the days when he was still piloting Winnie, he was already equipped with speed. When Mu appeared, the intensive training given caused his overall speed to increase significantly. He also enjoyed the excitement of being fast and furious. Despite that, he did not expect this day to come when what he valued and was proud of was being smashed into pieces. It was heartbreaking and disappointing.

That was not the only thing uncalled for.

Meanwhile, Johansson felt similar. The race came unexpectedly like a tsunami to his status quo!

In the Black Cove, Johansson was known for his speed among his batch mates. Among the other men who joined, he was outstanding although he was not the fastest, but he was well known at least. Speed was a technique he was an expert in and also the key to his victory! However, he too did not foresee that this day would come when he would almost compete with a mere puny boy from nowhere. Even though he was carrying a few hundred pounds of a meaty man in his hand, it seemed to be a huge disadvantage to the rationale of this situation. He knew that the “dumbbell” was pretty much nothing contrary to what the public would assume. So, even if there was nothing in his hand, he would not be much faster than he is at the moment!

Moreover, in a brief inspection through his sharp eyes, he could already reckon that the boy had much more room for improvement. It was obvious that the boy had yet undergone proper training since he wholly depended on the speed-burst by his feet. If the boy were to remedy some of the flaws he had, his speed would elevate by ten percent at the very least. By then, he would be much faster and had been long leading the race instead! If I

brought the boy to Hak and he was aware of how brilliant and potent this student was, he probably would be laughing his beard off. That annoying beard of his.

Thinking of how he might no longer be the best in Group-F, a rush of envy surged in him!

If that happened, Group-F would be exceptionally stronger with his existence. Then Group-F would be able to turn the tide! Johansson's mood elevated at that thought.

Both of them were having their own theater of monolog as they raced after one another!

Johansson was turning here and there while Ye Chong already lost his sense of direction. He had no idea where he was by then. He only knew that he had to follow the masked man. Johansson walked into the parking walkway next, and turned to Ye Chong, "Have a mech?"

"Yes!" He nodded.

"Good. Now, get on the mech and follow me!" The masked man summoned a dark mech. Hey! That was the same mech Ye Chong saw back when he was travelling through a belt of asteroids! That orbit-cleaning mech! He hurriedly called in his mech.

Before he took off, he did not forget to inform Bai Linan he had something to work on so Bai Linan had to stay at the Black Cove for awhile. Bai Linan had no idea what was going on, but he was more than glad to be able to stay in such a fancy place. He agreed without giving it a second thought.

Johansson's mech sped into the asteroid belts beside S.S. Zhi, and Ye Chong would not trifle with the new challenge as he went after in his mech.

Ye Chong never knew his little wish of "playing" in the asteroid belt with his mech would be granted so quickly. Johansson did not rush the tour. He just moved on in relaxation, like taking a stroll in

his backyard even though he was dodging the floating asteroids. Serene and graceful. On the other hand, Ye Chong was clumsily dodging them. He thought that it would not be a problem to do it in a mech when he was able to penetrate through the asteroid belt with a spacecraft previously. But in reality, the odds were against his favor. It was true that the mech was much more agile than a spacecraft, but it was the first time Ye Chong actually found his mech to be a little bit too agile. The asteroids here were denser and faster than the one he encountered before, and he was being harassed by the oncoming asteroids. One crash would cause an episode of dizziness. Fortunately, the advanced mech contained an advanced pressure-buffering system which saved Ye Chong's brain from getting smacked onto the control panel. It's just that Gold Wheat's gorgeous humanoid appearance got smacked into something else instead...

Johansson wasn't traveling fast; obviously he was waiting for Ye Chong to catch up.

Ye Chong followed the masked man in endless crash at the Elma Zone for about eight hours. Ye Chong lost his mind seeing the heavy belt of asteroids waiting to hit his face. He shrieked. How much longer we are going to do this! Where is the freaking the end of this place!

Johansson was as calm as before they started their journey. Not speeding, not slowing down either. At least Ye Chong's situation improved overtime; though he still got showered by the asteroids, he wasn't as clumsy as before.

On a side note, all kinds of electronic scanning devices tend to fail in this place. Ye Chong could only watch the environment with his naked eyes.

Another 8 hours flight to nowhere.

They eventually exited the asteroid belt. Ye Chong exhaled in relief.



Johansson flew on with Ye Chong on his tail, and withdraw from the asteroid belt speedily.

Two and a half hours later, a dark base appeared before them with lights that lit up brightly. The base was about the size of 10 S.S. Zhi Lan. It seemed to be modified from a tiny planet.

Johansson did not seem to be making an introduction anytime soon as he piloted quietly. Ye Chong had a few questions on his mind, but decided to follow suit.

As they inched towards the base, only then Ye Chong discovered the fact that the base was completely enveloped by a protective force; the space around the base was filled with satellites. The satellites were armed with electromagnetic cannons and that sent chills down his spine. Electromagnetic cannons of such kind would cause tiny planets with diameter less than 20 kilometers to crumble in one blast, and their orbit would be changed dramatically without a doubt!

Ye Chong went after the masked man into a returning port slowly. As they were close, Ye Chong saw a protective veil about 15 meters thick. He was shocked. If he remembered correctly, a board about this thick would cost a whopping price even in the size of a palm! Plus, the base had this kind of board everywhere in the air! Even a caveman like Ye Chong who lacked the actual concept of prices and values was having a hard time to let it sink in.

Johansson signaled Ye Chong to stop daydreaming and move. Ye Chong followed on swiftly right away!

Into the base, the masked man lobbed the bodyguard out of the cabin and someone took him over to the side. I wonder what the man's fate would be. Ye Chong lacked the curiosity to know more.

The masked man then gestured him to stay in his mech. They would be traveling at the base in the mech.

They arrived at a giant black door. The masked man stopped as

the door opened up automatically.

Both of their mechs gradually engulfed by the dark gate.

# Chapter 49: Through the Mask

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Three grown men stood in a confined room; there were two masked man including Johansson and also Ye Chong.

The other masked man hurled the same black mask they were wearing to Ye Chong and ordered menacingly, “Put it up!”

Ye Chong picked it up and felt the peculiar texture in his hands. The mask was surprisingly very soft when touched and it seemed to be made out of special materials too. There was a code written beneath the mask - F-58. He tried putting it on and the mask fitted on his face unexpectedly well as if it was specially tailored for Ye Chong. His face was layered by the mysterious aura of the mask. It fitted so well that he could even feel the mask mimicking his facial expressions; the mask would trace even the slightest twitch of muscle, and it had great airflow as well. Ye Chong did not feel the stuffiness he was expecting wearing a mask. Instead, he almost forgot that he was wearing one.

“I am Hak, your instructor!” His voice roared in the room, “And I'll be invigilating your examination. Johansson, take the lead!”

“The examination begins!” Johansson notified in a rumbling voice as he stood opposite of Ye Chong.

Ye Chong got into his ready-stance, anticipating the upcoming trials.

Johansson rushed into his position with his arms crossed embracing himself. He knew that this was merely a test, therefore took a more defensive position.

Ye Chong began seriously, a heavy stomp with his right. The room shook a little by that powerful burst of his. Instructor Hak's face had a hint of surprise as he witnessed this by the side. Ye Chong bravely leaped towards Johansson and whimpered as he threw a punch with his right fist.

Johansson gracefully spun to the side and dodged the attack. Ye Chong missed, and almost fell from losing his balance. It would be an opportunity to experience Johansson's counterattack, but he remained on the defensive side and patiently waited for Ye Chong's next strike. Ye Chong regained his stance and was prepared to launch the following punches. He raised his fist, but before he could come into contact with Johansson, a thunderous voice broke his action.

“Stop right there!” Instructor Hak ended the little fight between them. “Enough!” Ye Chong was dumbfounded. I was evaluated with only a punch? Johansson seemed to be much more aware of such interruption through his gesture.

Instructor Hak walked to Ye Chong and stared into his eyes, “I don't care who you were. I don't know where you came from, and I don't want to know what you have worked for. From now on, this mask is yours. As long as you are in the Black Cove, you shall never remove this mask. Never. Ever! Anytime or anywhere! Your code would be F-58. You will be the 58th member of Group-F. Now, state your name!”

“Ye-“

“Pseudoname! Everyone here uses a pseudoname or a codename.” Right before Ye Chong actually gave his actual name away, Instructor Hak interrupted him with a gentle reminder.

Ye Chong did not ponder much on this request, “Mu. I am Mu!” The name slipped right off his mouth so naturally.

“Follow Johansson to your campsite now. It's Group-F. He would arrange the accommodation for you,” Instructor Hak ordered. “Welcome to the world of real Pilots!” he said sternly.

On the way to his campsite, Johansson lectured him some exclusive rules of survival in Black Cove.

Firstly, never inquire anything about someone. This would

create enemies without knowing.

Secondly, never expose personal details about yourself to the others. That was to guarantee your life in the Black Cove.

Thirdly, never demonstrate your true strength in order to live longer.

Johansson mentioned the grave rules nonchalantly. Even though, that was alarming enough for Ye Chong to be aware of the hidden danger of this place. Ye Chong started to tense.

Johansson in the meantime somehow was able to identify the alert in Ye Chong's eyes. His own eyes expressed approval.

The campsite for Group-F was quite spacious. However, Johansson did not seem to be in the mood to give Ye Chong a tour of the place. He just guided him all the way to an empty room, "This will be your room. You will be living here from now on." Johansson said as he pointed at the room. "If you want food, there's a cafeteria. We passed it awhile ago. You should know!"

Ye Chong nodded.

"Good! Go find Instructor Hak yourself tomorrow. He will be teaching you some tricks!" Johansson left the scene after that.

Johansson's unfriendliness wasn't foreign to Ye Chong. He was more used to adapting to surroundings all by himself. On the contrary, if people were too friendly to him when they first met, it would bring him discomfort, and he would be unable to blend in well.

Although this was an unoccupied room, it still required fingerprint and palm-print verification in order to check in, but that wasn't new to Ye Chong either. It did not take him much time to set up the security system. The room was well-furnished, and was a large room too compared to his home back in Trash Planet-12; this was at a much larger scale. There were a number of things that Ye Chong did not come across in his life. He had yet to use

them before. For starters, he tried experimenting with gadgets in the room just to find out what they did and how they were used. Luckily, Ye Chong wasn't a greenhorn to electronic devices, and they were much simpler in his eyes. Soon, he understood the method to use every item in the room.

He took a shower before drifting off to sleep.

Ye Chong rose early the next day as the grumbling of his tummy woke him up. He ran to the cafeteria right away. He thought that he came early enough without knowing there was already a crowd. Everyone was taking their breakfast silently. The cafeteria was filled with people, and was roomy as well, but it was dead! The atmosphere felt so tense it was too stressful to stay.

He had a hearty breakfast; scrumptious food wafted down to Ye Chong's tummy. The food was new to him and he finished up happily. Still, the atmosphere was rather somber.

Ye Chong finished his breakfast and went to the place where he saw Instructor Hak the day before.

On the way there, he noticed that everyone was indeed wearing their masks, but he did not see anyone greeting each other. This place was somber enough for folks of the outside world. But to a man who was used to living alone like Ye Chong, such simple life without interaction was rather relaxing.

He arrived at Instructor Hak's place, and spotted the instructor teaching something to a member. Ye Chong recalled what Johansson had told him before, so he withdrew himself and waited by the side quietly.

Instructor Hak had already seen Ye Chong right when he arrived. He was impressed at how Ye Chong did not approach him out of curiosity, but waited at the side with patience instead. The instructor's eyes shone with admiration.

Ye Chong waited for 30 minutes for that member to exit the room

as Instructor Hak waved at him. He entered the room without a delay.

The instructor initiated the conversation, "The fight yesterday was just to identify your level while what we are going to do today... would be testing you in a variety of skills. Come with me!" Both of them moved to a room filled with apparatus.

Moments later, Instructor Hak looked through the test report of Ye Chong's performance. His jaw dropped as he stared on in blank dismay.

The outcome of the test was more than just astonishing! If he did not observe Ye Chong's tests with his own eyes, he would never believe the results in his hand; from someone who had not undergone the Black Cove's training! He was under 20 too!

His physique was in tip-top condition! He was the first one-of-a-kind that Instructor Hak came across! Even the dummy in Group-A would not be on par with Ye Chong before training.

Speed was the most outstanding aspect of his performance. In full force, his running speed could hit 5.32 Hz! Even Johansson, the best runner in the group could only go as fast as 5.54 Hz after the training. How astounding!

His strength was remarkable as well. How could he possess such intense amount of strength without changing the physical attribute of his body, and not to mention the absence of special training in the Black Cove? Instructor Hak had his doubts. Technically, he wasn't the only one who was puzzled by this oddity. Mu's processors nearly malfunction when he tried to figure out the cause behind it. Eventually, Mu gave up and decided that Ye Chong was an oddball to reason everything.

But with this amount of power, Instructor Hak could imagine if the infamous power-creep Facherny, who excelled similarly in strength was notified of this boy's existence, chances are he would come barging in, smashed the door and dragged this boy away! Of

course, this time, Instructor Hak was affirmed with his new student. He would never let that happen despite that power-freak's rampage.

This Mu boy was extremely good with his balancing and dexterity too! The instructor could see that when he did sharp-turnings at high speed. His action was swift and flexible; there wasn't any pause at all!

He was also calm and smart which was really important.

To top it off, the most shocking part to Instructor Hak was the speed of the boy's hands attack! An absolute fearsome velocity to one's eyes!



# Chapter 50: Time Phase

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These are a pair of hands with frightening speed. Instructor Hak never thought of anyone outside the Black Cove that could have such speed. The hands were known to be the most agile part of the body as well as being capable to do various tasks. The agility of the hands is directly proportional to the number of tasks one could do in a set amount of time. In simpler terms, the faster one's hand is the more tasks one could complete in limited time. Thus, its significance does not require much explanation. Edging between life and death, one's outcome could be possibly be determined by actions that are taken or decisions made in that few milliseconds. Such outstanding speed was truly a rare sight in the Black Cove!

This boy that stood before Instructor Hak seemed to have yet to be aware of the true power of his own hands.

Instructor Hak looked at Ye Chong standing still at the side, nodding his head in approval, "Brilliant! Absolutely brilliant!"

Ye Chong did not utter a word. He stood on in silence.

Suddenly, a thought crossed the instructor's mind and it took him a while to phrase it in a way that this little boy could comprehend, "Tell me what you know about being a Pilot."

Ye Chong tilted his head as he thought about it, "The controller of the mech!"

"Well..." He nodded his head, "That's what people would normally assume!" The reply surprised Ye Chong as he raised his head, looking at the instructor with his eyes enlarged.

"The Pilots..." Instructor Hak explained calmly with a kind of unidentified nostalgia in his tone, "They aren't what you all had always assumed to be. How the world outside defines the Pilots and how the world examine them, they were absurd and meaningless. Hmph! Those are just some assumptions for kids! The real world of

Pilots is beyond your imagination... and beyond your knowledge too! Everyone from the outside would never know and no one would ever understand! Do you know what the Pilots formerly were?"

Ye Chong shook his head.

"The Pilots used to be the kind who adores power. The advancement of the age of machinery allowed people to realize the power hidden within the gears. The ancient martial arts and the sorcery from the tradition soon vanished and in return, the emergence of the Pilots! However, in later times, people started to discover the more potent outcome and a much higher survivability when the mech was actually piloted by a martial artist or a sorcerer. Then, it so happened that the people combined the artistry of martial arts, sorcery and mech-piloting, forming the new generation of Pilots. These Pilots when unarmed were barely an opponent to go against the classic martial artist or sorcerer, but if they were to mount onto a mech, they could exert immense strength."

Instructor Hak carried on with his explanation about one particular incident that changed the world, "About 500 years ago, there was a crisis, a never-before-seen crisis, a big one, and many had perished. Most of the surviving men turned out to be actual Pilots, while this inevitably led to the ending of the other kinds of forces. 300 years ago, something catastrophic happened again! Pilots were dispersed throughout the galaxy and known by the outside world! But what they got in the end was undoubtedly rather obsolete. Still, regarding what actually happened in the past, what connected the beginning and the ending of the history, I had no idea either!" Quickly, the instructor added, "Anyway, it was not easy to educate people of your kind from the five major galaxies to understand the concept of ancient martial arts and sorcery."

Ye Chong's heart trembled! There was such a backstory to this? I

never knew! Since Instructor Hak could tell such tale directly from his mouth, it seemed that he wasn't the man from the five major galaxies too! He might come from somewhere that was unknown by the others, and that particular place somehow had a strange connection to the galaxies.

"The major elements of a Pilot..." He lectured as he continued emphasizing the salutation to the more-than-just-mech-controller he knew, "...are physique, mech and mentality. And these also directly caused the formation of three major schools - one being the kind that combined martial arts and technology, strives to obtain the ultimate body, another being the kind that incorporated sorcery into technology. Yes, the mentality for such kind is usually much stronger, and there's this kind who does purely machinery. To be frank, this is the most hated school out of the three because they perform direct modification towards your body, turning them into a chimera or something. They neither look like humans nor machines. But I must say they are still strong in their nature! It is undeniable to say that they also had the most advanced mech out of all the schools!" Even though Instructor Hak expressed blatant disgust and hatred as he spoke, he still acknowledged their strength.

Ye Chong was enjoying every bit of the storytelling. He was all ears, all eyes and all heart!

"You must have figured it out by now, boy. We are the first school, but I can't deny the fact that the martial arts do have an amazing effect on the development of anatomy. The ancient arts were great and grand. Nevertheless, we only extracted a small part of it to be utilized." He looked at Ye Chong, "I had no idea how you did your training before and I don't see you having any kind of energy pulse. But you do have immense muscle strength and oddly every fabric of your muscle had barely enlarged like what others should have. This is confusing to me!" He expressed his puzzlement towards this anomaly before him but he didn't seem to be

interested to investigate further. "Alright, come with me!"

Instructor Hak led Ye Chong into a large lobby. There were quite a number of oviform apparatus. The outer shell of the apparatus was made out of a transparent material; there was a kind of silver liquid inside, and it looked rather sticky. Among the apparatus, a few were occupied by humans as they immersed into it with their eyes closed. They looked serene and enjoyed using the apparatus.

Instructor Hak said pointing at one of the empty oval capsule, "Go on, and give it a try!" Ye Chong walked towards the capsule with suspicion. The capsule uncapped, an opening just enough to fit Ye Chong in, and Ye Chong walked into it. Ye Chong was fully enclosed in the capsule. The silver liquid sprinkled from underneath, filling up the space; starting from the leg, to the knees, then the waist and the chest, but stopped at the neck eventually.

Lethargy surged through his body, and every inch of his muscle felt warm. It was so comfortable that Ye Chong felt like yawning. He started to become sleepy yet he somehow felt perfectly conscious at the same time; stuck in between the state of sleep, and being awake.

After an unknown amount of time, Ye Chong jumped awake. He saw how the instructor scrutinized him carefully, wondering what he was thinking under that black mask of his. The silver liquid ebbed away like sea tides and in a blink of an eye, the liquid in the capsule was drained completely. Ye Chong was shocked to see there wasn't even a single drop of silver liquid left behind while his clothing was in the same condition as when he entered. It was not wet, it was not tainted either.

"How was it?" The instructor asked as Ye Chong stepped out of the capsule.

Ye Chong nodded, "Good! Pretty good!"

"Now..." The instructor's eyes gleamed peculiarly, "Do you feel

energized? Does your whole body feel like it's filled with strength that is anticipating to be unleashed?"

He did notice it right away when the silver liquid retreated from his body. He felt hot, his body was heated up, and fully charged again. The need to unleash his immense strength took over his thoughts at the mention of it from the instructor. He nodded his head right away.

"Come with me!" Instructor Hak brought Ye Chong to a spacious training field. There were various kinds of training facilities. "You are going to use up all your stamina here. Head back to the capsule after and use the facilities again. Repeat the process three times and you are good to go. Alright, it's up to you now." He walked away.

He obeyed his instructor's order obediently. He drained all his strength every single time, and returned to the capsule for a quick recharge. In the capsule, he could feel his strength charging up again, bit by bit. It felt perplexing indeed.

He rushed back to the field to exhaust his stamina after charging, and noticed the intensive boost in his stamina recovery when he dipped in the capsule. After that, he no longer felt the heat; he started to get used to it and reacted normally.

It was almost dawn when he finished his training, but he did not feel hungry at all when he was done! It was surprising because he did not have a meal at all! He believed it could be one of the effects of the silver liquid.

He found his old partner in training, the metallic marbles in the field. He grabbed a handful of them into his pocket, and went back to his room. He met Johansson on the way back, but they did not exchange words. Instead, they nodded at each other politely and went their separate ways.

# Chapter 51: Mu's Awakening

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This was Ye Chong's third month in Black Cove and his task of the day was to mine for black gold ore. The ore was one Black Cove's speciality commonly found scattered in orbits around the planet. It was indeed a tedious job to mine the valuable ore. The mining ships could not enter the asteroid belt, so mechs were utilized instead. It was impossible to perform scans of the asteroid belts. Hence, holographic images were taken and inspected with the naked eye in search of ore deposits. The process of mining the ore was also akin to a mixed training regimen that tested one's piloting skills and eyesight. To make matters worse, the procedure of transporting the ore back was also a challenging task.

The yield of the black gold ore was extremely low. It was primarily used to manufacture the black masks worn by Ye Chong and the rest.

Ye Chong's mech, the F-58 was similar to the others' in Black Cove. They were all black humanoid mechs. However, due to Ye Chong's deft hands, his mech was modified to include a few extra features which kept it at par with his skills.

In truth, Ye Chong had improved tremendously in these past few months. More importantly, he began to understand the concept of battle strategies instead of relying solely on his instincts and experiences as he did before. He also thought that Mu's foundation training for him was not as ridiculous as Hak said, but was surprisingly quite useful to him. Ye Chong was not very skilled in the ancient martial arts and he was not particularly interested in them either. For instance, Ye Chong did not find that the breathing technique taught by Hak was effective. As for foundation and steel sphere training taught by Mu, he finally surpassed the tenth level of steel spheres that he was struggling with for a long time after sacrificing blood and tears. The silver liquid's effect was truly remarkable and it sure did give him

satisfaction.

Ye Chong had seen Hak in action. Although he had the strength of a bull, Ye Chong still felt a hint of disappointment. If Hak and Mu were to fight against each other in a combat, Ye Chong was quite confident that Mu will take him down effortlessly with just a stab.

“Oh dear Mu, when will you wake up? I miss you so much!” Ye Chong thought to himself.

His vision darkened and Ye Chong shifted his focus back to reality only to realise that his mech was approaching towards a very large rock. Ye Chong was startled and immediately maneuvered his mech out of its way just in time to avoid collision.

The presence of the rock indicated that the black gold ores were depleting around that particular area. Thus, he would have to travel further into the asteroid belt in order to get his hands on the ore.

Ye Chong drove his mech deeper into the recesses of the asteroid belt.

He flew deeper inside and yet could not manage to find any black gold ore along the way. It seemed that he was out of luck today.

Ye Chong was dispirited. However, as he decided to make a turn back, a huge black gold ore of around two meters in diameter came into view and it was heading further away from him at a high speed.

Ye Chong gained confidence and pulled himself together. Without further hesitation, he accelerated his mech and went after the giant black gold ore.

All of a sudden, his mech rocked violently and Ye Chong felt as though he lost control of it and being pulled in by a strong attractive force. The mech was flying all by itself.

Ye Chong immediately sensed something amiss. He quickly

reversed the engines and steered backwards in hopes of escaping the pulling force.

Even though he had increased the engine's capacity to its maximum, his mech was still being pulled forward.

When Ye Chong looked ahead, he was dumbstruck. The debris around him were pulled towards the same direction as his mech by an external force. Ye Chong then noticed that the debris were forming a whirlpool pattern and he became aware of what he was about to face.

An asteroid whirlpool! This must be an asteroid whirlpool! This was Elma Zone's most terrifying feature. Due to its existence, not many dared to venture into the depths of the zone.

"No way! How can I be so out of luck?" Ye Chong wailed mentally.

Ye Chong tried desperately to escape from the grasp of the asteroid whirlpool but no matter what he did, it was of no use!

As the asteroid whirlpool grew larger, it became more visible. Ye Chong realized how massive the asteroid whirlpool was and realised that he was just a speck of dust compared to it!

Ye Chong felt very helpless.

At that moment, he thought that his fate was about to be ripped to shreds. Who would have thought that after rebelling against his destiny for so many years, his death was determined by an asteroid whirlpool? Ye Chong drowned in his sad thoughts.

"Idiot! What are you fantasizing about? Are you looking forward to your death?" a voice suddenly played in his mind.

Ye Chong startled and felt an instant joy. "Mu, is that you?"

"Alright, there's no time for talking. Now direct the mech nine degrees away from the radius vector and make small bi-directional angle adjustments along the way!" His assumption wasn't wrong.



It was Mu! This was a voice Ye Chong would never forget in his life!

Ye Chong suppressed his overjoyed emotions and quickly moved his hands over the controls. He did not have any doubts on Mu's instructions. If there was someone whom Ye Chong trusted with his life, it would definitely be Mu!

Ye Chong's hands manipulated the controls at lightning speed. His breakthrough with the ten steel spheres in his training had paid off in this situation. Ye Chong's shadow-like hands were no longer just skin and bones, but they were as solid as rocks.

Ye Chong's F-58 suddenly changed its direction and started to shake vigorously and laterally at small-angles. The F-48 was like a black fish desperately struggling to escape from a fishing net, struggling non-stop! Like a miracle, the F-58 began to pull away from the asteroid whirlpool!

Ye Chong gave a sigh of relieve.

"Now switch to eight degrees from the radius vector and repeat the motion!" Mu's voice rang again.

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"Hu, hu, ..." Ye Chong panted heavily. All the hustle and bustle to save the ship from being sucked into the asteroid whirlpool had drained most of his energy but it was all worth it.

"Looks like you have improved tremendously!" Mu commented lightly.

Ye Chong was still absorbed in the joy of escaping death and reuniting with Mu. "Yeah, I've been training at Black Cove and learnt quite a few things!"

"Black Cove?" Mu's tone sounded off.

And so, Ye Chong began his story from when he first awakened. Mu listened intently while occasionally interjecting a few

questions.

When Ye Chong finished, Mu went quiet.

“Is there a problem?” Ye Chong asked curiously.

Mu kept silent for a few moments before answering, “That Black Cove that you mentioned might be a problem!”

“A problem?” Ye Chong was baffled.

Mu did not answer him directly, but instead he asked, “Ye, did they give you this mech?”

Ye Chong nodded. “Yeah, this mech has an amazing performance and it can even withstand the deadly asteroid whirlpool. I’m impressed!”

“Remove the seventh photon circuit board from under the controls in the mech and check it carefully,” Mu’s voice was still calm as ever.

Ye Chong took out the seventh photon circuit board as instructed and began inspecting. He believed Mu had his reasons for him to do it. Hmm! As expected, something was not right. There seemed to be a return circuit that was capable of signalling. By logic, there should not be a return circuit in this part of the circuit board.

Ye Chong might not be well educated in worldly matters, but he was not dim. On the contrary, he was very bright and he could deal with situations like these with a breeze. Without hesitation, Ye Chong used some tools to remove that photon return circuit for he was not keen on being spied upon.

“Don’t worry. It’s just this one spot. I have checked the rest for you!” Mu spoke leisurely.

Ye Chong only acknowledged with an “Oh.” Ye Chong was not particularly angry about it since he had learned much from them and there was no free lunch in this world. “However, the food at their canteen was not that bad,” Ye Chong thought yearningly and

licked his lips.

“Ye, you said you were soaked in some kind of silver liquid.”

“Mm, you’re not saying that’s a problem too right?” Ye Chong said with hesitation.

“The possibility is very high!” Mu did not care for Ye Chong’s feelings and spoke plainly.

“That damned Black Cove...” Ye Chong was about to give a furious glare in the direction of Black Cove to express his anger when he suddenly panicked. “Mu, I think we’re lost!”

“I realized earlier on,” Mu replied lazily.

“What do we do?”

“Based on my experience, anything that happens around you can be said to be incalculable events,” Mu declared decisively.

## Chapter 52: Out of this Predicament

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“Mu, do you think we’re heading in the right direction?” Ye Chong asked in desperation of having a conversation with Mu as though he hadn’t spoken to him for days.

“The probability of escaping is the same no matter which direction we opt to go for,” Mu replied calmly.

“But Mu, why do you need so much black gold ore?” Ye Chong asked curiously.

“That information is classified! I am not in place to say anything regarding this matter,” Mu answered with full of mystery. Mu added that black gold ore was an extremely rare mineral. The black gold derived from the ore, which was scientifically named Klose, had not only outstanding physical characteristics, but also self-restoration capabilities. The latter was the mineral’s most valuable quality.

Who would have thought that the black gold ore that he found along the way was more than he had ever mined before altogether. Mu kept all the black gold ore in his alternate dimension. No matter how large the ore was, Mu only needed to raise his hands and the ore would vanish into thin air. Ye Chong was very impressed by his talent! It was a pity when Mu told him that that was an exclusive trick of his which was never taught to others.

Ye Chong was discouraged and twitched his mouth. Suddenly, he realized something he had never thought of before. “Ah, I heard that there were many skillful mech engineers and mechanics on Black Cove. I should have asked them if they could restore you! How could I have forgotten that?” Ye Chong hit his head lightly with disappointment. In front of Mu, Ye Chong acted like a complete different person!

“The mech you are piloting now is one of their products?” Mu asked.

“Yeah, this mech is not so bad after all!” Ye Chong replied.

“Then they would never be able to restore me,” Mu said with confidence. The arrogance in his tone made Ye Chong gave him a sidelong glance.

Fortunately, Ye Chong had the habit of having backup energy cells with him. No matter how durable the F-58 can be, it's would have been depleted if not for those backup cells. Ye Chong had the high energy organic liquid food stored as emergency ration on the mech as he yearned for the delicacies at the canteen in Black Cove. This further increased his suffering.

Mu was still in the alternate dimension to minimize energy usage.

Black Cove mechs were very advanced. Ye Chong's F-58, for example, was only a training mech, but all of its parts and accessories were far more advanced than all the high tech mechs Ye Chong had ever piloted before. The overall performance was also a level above the rest. As for the engine, the design for this model was different from that of the more popular engine structures in the market. Ye Chong had once dissected the F-58 himself for inspection. Whether it was in terms of the engine power or continuous flight time, the F-58's engine outperformed the so-called superb engines in the market by a wide margin.

Of course, compared to Mu's sophisticated engine structure, it was still child's play. Ye Chong still had not managed to decipher Mu's engine schematics diagram.

Ye Chong and Mu found another half-a-meter wide black gold ore. Ye Chong summoned Mu from the alternate dimension and Mu immediately approached the black gold ore.

Suddenly, Ye Chong sensed something amiss and spoke to Mu with full of uncertainty, “Mu, look! The asteroids here are a lot fewer!”

Mu replied lazily, “To be precise, the unit space density of asteroids here is 62% less than it was ten hours ago. However, this percentage has a certain random factor and is only used as a reference!”

Ye Chong was excited. “It looks like we’re flying in the right direction!”

Mu poured cold water onto his enthusiasm as usual. “Don’t get happy too soon. If we manage to leave the asteroid belt, then what? Who knows where we are. Are there planets nearby? How far away are they from us? Is it inhabited? If there are no starships...”

Mu paused abruptly and his tone took an anxious turn. “Quick! Steer fifteen degrees from the radius vector and fly straight ahead! Maximum speed!” Mu swiftly kept the black gold ore into the alternate dimension and returned himself there.

Upon hearing his words, Ye Chong knew there must be new changes in their situation. He stopped conserving energy as before and accelerated the mech to its maximum velocity. After spending some time in the asteroid belt, Ye Chong was now quite skillful in avoiding the asteroids. Although the speed was now maximised, Ye Chong still managed to easily and adroitly evade the rocks in front of him. Mu was surprised by his ability. “Ye, your skills are great!”

Ye Chong may seemed to be at ease after hearing those words, but he was entirely focused on flying the mech so he did not reply Mu. His eyes were plastered to the holographic screen fearing for any mishaps. At this speed, no matter how solid the F-58’s armour was, his mech would not survive an impact with an asteroid. Ye Chong sure did not want to take this situation lightly!

The ores which were visible in sight became lesser with time and Ye Chong felt more relieved. Ye Chong also knew that he had finally reached the edge of the asteroid belt and was greatly encouraged by that fact.

As expected, after a light beep sounded, Ye Chong's scanning systems returned to normal and began to scan the surroundings automatically.

Black Cove produced excellent products! The F-58's detection system, one that Ye Chong had never used before was actually quite modern. It immediately detected something abnormal ahead and a red spot on the holographic screen began to enlarge! As the holographic image became larger, it also became clearer to view.

It's a starship! Ye Chong was overjoyed and revved the engines to approach the ship.

Three minutes later, the other party was still not aware of his presence! Ye Chong was intrigued. While the F-58 could detect its target at such a far distance due to its advanced detection system, how could the other party not manage to notice him now that he meters away from the starship? Could it be that the F-58 also had an excellent anti-detection system? Ye Chong immediately searched through the information in the photon processor of the F-58. As he had in mind, the F-58's armour had a special absorptive material mixed into it and the material was capable of absorbing a wide spectrum of waves, resulting in the mech's exceptional anti-detection performance. This material also gave the mech its black colour.

"Black Cove was a formidable force, but what were they aiming for?" This thought flashed through Ye Chong's mind. "What does have to do with me? It's not like I'm going back." Ye Chong thought conceitedly.

"Should we carry out a surprise attack on them?" Ye Chong inquired Mu for his opinion. The method, as expected, suited his usual habit and style.

"A surprise attack? If the starship is damaged then you'll be finished!" Mu obviously disagreed. "This seems to be an average civilian ship. You can signal them first!"

“Ok!” Ye Chong did not have a better idea. From his past experiences, he knew that an external damage on the starship would be devastating. If it wasn’t for One-eye’s well equipped ship, he might not have survived!

The other party did not seem nervous upon receiving his signal. Instead, they replied repeatedly that they were medical volunteers.

“Medical volunteers? What are those?” Ye Chong asked with full of curiosity.

Mu explained, “Medical volunteers are people who have expertise in medical skills or nursing. They offer free medical treatment for all, charging no fees, and they usually lead more difficult lives. Their principle is that life trumps all! Since they believe that all lives are equal, even if pirates are injured, they would also offer treatments. Hence, they are respected by almost everyone and no pirate would rob the medical volunteers. On the contrary, when the volunteers were in their hunting zone, the pirates would send escorts to protect them!”

“They are mostly amiable and kind in nature besides being incredibly sympathetic. I believe that if you were to ask for a ride on their ship, they will not reject you!” Mu suggested.

“Amiable?” Ye Chong thought of all the mutants he was familiar with on the trash planet and could not even remember any of them being what Mu described as amiable. It was truly confounding! “Since Mu had said so, he wouldn’t be wrong!” Ye Chong thought to himself.

Ye Chong agreed to his suggestion and signalled a request to board the ship!



# Chapter 53: On Board the Ship

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Vella watched the mech that was slowly closing in on the starship.

Vella was greatly surprised when he received a message from the other party as he did not notice their presence earlier. Shocked, Vella began to adjust the holographic display and finally found the other party's location after much effort.

Vella was in his forties. His short, bushy moustache made him look like a macho man.

Vella was secretly impressed. The other party had obviously entered their warning zone. However, their ship's warning system did not sound an alarm. This implied that the other party's anti-detection system was far more sophisticated compared to the warning system of this ship!

Once he received the signal that requested for boarding, Vella rest assured that the other party harboured no ill will. He was very much relieved. An invisible enemy was not someone anybody would like to encounter.

After receiving the green light from Old Mr Wang, Vella accepted the request.

As the mech neared, Vella finally saw what the other party really looked like - his expression twisted and his heart raced.

Vella was adventurous during his youth and had established a small reputation amongst the like-minded. He had also spent some time at Black Cove for a certain period of time. He would never forget the appearance of this mech - it was a symbol of incomparable strength and cruelty. He had seen many whom disregarded the prohibition of violence at Black Cove killed on the spot although there were quite a number of them who were stronger than him.

For countless years, he had never seen anyone from Black Cove leave the place. Vella was intrigued but he wasn't planning on treating his life as a joke. As such, he brushed away his curiosity quickly.

Beside him, Wang Weiqi curled her lips in distaste. "That mech looks hideous!" Wang Weiqi was tall and her exquisite face was complemented with a charming smile. Her soft, shiny long hair was braided, giving her a clean look. Her large, glistening eyes blinked as though they could speak and were a fatal charm for most men!

The F-58 was around ten meters long and was thoroughly black in colour, making it look unremarkable. Since it was a training mech, it was not armed with excessive weapons and was only equipped with a UF magnetic sword as per Ye Chong's request and two redesigned parrying lance. For safety in the asteroid belt, the F-58 also carried a big alloy shield of over five meters long on its back. The slightly arched shield resulted in the comical look of the F-58, looking like it was carrying a shell. However, the sharp edges of the shield clearly indicated that the shield was not only for defense purposes. What caught most of Vella's attention were the two curved blades at the elbow joints of the mech. They normally lay flat on the upper arms, but by bending at the joints, the sharp tip of the blades and the terrifying edges would show their vile selves.

Wan Ziqing, who was also with them, nodded in agreement. "Of course he's not as beautiful as Qi'er's Phantasm, tsk tsk, that look is surely awful..."

Wang Weiqi was Old Mr Wang's granddaughter whom had passed the exams for intermediate level of mech piloting at a very young age. The main reason of tagging along with her grandfather on this trip is because she was worried of his safety. Besides, she would also get the opportunity to widen her knowledge in preparation for the expert level of mech piloting exams. Wan

Ziqing was Wang Weiqi's senior. He began making his move on her at school, and now he was here with her! In all honesty, Wan Ziqing was a fine-looking man. However, Wang Weiqi was indifferent and being neither friendly nor aloof with him, and that drove him crazy.

Vella smiled wryly hoping that the pair of naive youngsters would not meddle with the jinxed newcomer. Vella was uncomfortable with the thought and could not help but speak up to the two, "You two better not meddle with that person. He's not someone you can afford to mess with!" When he saw that they were not taking him seriously, he raised his voice and spoke firmly, "Qi'er, Ziqing, you hear me?"

Wang Weiqi stuck her tongue out a little and made a silly face at Wan Ziqing. Uncle Vella had always took care of them and the two could only give him an obedient look.

Vella rushed out of the bridge and welcomed the mysterious guest!

"Black mask and black windbreaker. Exactly as I imagined." Vella thought to himself. The black mask with a peculiar glimmer had a soft quality to it and the silver irises were intimidatingly chilling. The strong visual contrast between black and white captured the attention of everyone around, such that they did not notice the little insignia on the mask's edge that marked "F-58". Of course, Vella was an exception for he had seen the black masks before. The loose windbreaker wrapped Ye Chong entirely adding to his mysteriousness of the medical volunteers.

Wang Weiqi thought to herself, "It would be so cool to have a mask like that! Definitely eye-catching!"

Ye Chong was always particularly respectful towards the elders since they reminded him of his deceased Papa and the Aurora's elders who treated him well.

Ye Chong's actions were surprising to Vella. He did not think

that a cold-blooded guard from the Black Cove would be so courteous to the elderly. Perhaps they weren't as heartless as they all thought they were. Vella finally began to feel assured.

He was just in time for lunch and Ye Chong was invited to join them. Ye Chong ate heartily at the dining table, ignoring the stares of others at him. After his seventh bowl of food, Ye Chong rubbed his almost full stomach and thought contentedly, "While this is still far from the delicacies at Black Cove, it's still much better than the F-58's high energy organic liquid food."

After greeting the people around him, Ye Chong returned to the room Vella prepared for him under their astonished gazes.

Exercising to assist in his digestion was Ye Chong's habit.

He began with a full-body routine. Ye Chong did a little warm up, then moved and ran across the room. "Running" might not be an accurate term. Ye Chong moved with the tips of his feet - his toes touched the ground and his body flew forward in response. However, the room was too small and Ye Chong had to keep changing directions. He ended up circling around the room instead.

Ye Chong increased his speed. His tip-toed landings on the ground began to produce muffled sounds. Now, the rhythm grew faster and the sound became louder.

After ten minutes, Ye Chong finally stopped. Beads of sweat marked his forehead and his breathing became heavier. Ye Chong shook his dizzy head forcefully.

Mu was a little surprised. "Ye, you've improved!"

Ye Chong laughed cheekily in response as he took out the steel spheres from the waist pocket in his windbreaker and placed them on the ground. He took a deep breath and placed his hands above the spheres, barely touching them. Ye Chong felt clear headed enough and exhaled slowly before his hands began to move.

Ye Chong gathered his attention and focused, banishing all distractions.

A shadow shrouded over the steep spheres and the spheres began to collide with each other violently. They moved really fast and their trajectories after impact were difficult to predict. However, they always bounced back from the edges of the shadow region. The steel spheres moved faster and the shadow continued to spread. The crisp sounds from the colliding steel spheres within the shadow were almost continuously ringing.

Ye Chong was about to put more strength onto his hands when he was suddenly alerted which broke his concentration. He shouted, “Who’s that?” as he swiped all the steel spheres back into his hands.

He rolled backwards on instinct and shot three steel spheres!

## Chapter 54: The Callous Ye Chong

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The thumb-sized steel spheres shrieked terrifyingly!

Two steel spheres embedded themselves in the door with two bangs reaching ten centimeters deep into the C-N\* duroplast material - two centimeters away from penetrating the door. Another steel sphere went through the gap of the doorway and hit the opposite wall of the walkway which was also deeply embedded within.

Wang Weiqi's face became pale and went as white as a sheet!

The steel sphere that went through the door had missed the tip of her nose by less than a centimeter. The strong airstream that went with the sphere made her felt a hint of pain at her nose. If she had a mirror, she would have noticed a small cut on her nose tip due to the piercing airflow. A drop of blood started streaming down the top of her nose.

She had never felt so close to death before. "The steel sphere was fast enough to burrow deep into the wall. If it had hit my body, I would have... I would have..." As she thought of it, terror enveloped her soul at an instant. Wang Weiqi screamed in and ran away as fast as she could with her hands covering her face. She had only one wish then and that was to get out of the haunted room!

Ye Chong was ready to strike the steel balls again when he heard a piercing scream followed by loud thumps of footsteps slowly fading away.

Mu popped out in Ye Chong's thoughts, "Ye, how could you be so uncouth towards a girl?"

Ye Chong asked naively, "What do you mean?"

Mu spoke as though he expected such a reaction from him, "In this world, outside of trash planets, women are thought to be

deserving of tenderness and care. Hence, most would hesitate to start a fight against women. Some had never even placed a finger on them!”

Ye Chong was curious, “Why? Just because they’re women?”

Mu gave it a thought and agreed, “It appears to be the case.”

Ye Chong disapproved. “What a strange logic! But the strangest thing is that you, Mu, had proposed such strange logic!”

Mu kept silent as though he was choked.

Ye Chong was pleased with himself, “My skill was not bad, right?”

Mu was unimpressed. “The attack was too weak. It wasn’t enough to penetrate through the door. If it had, then it would be a threat to the enemy! Besides, you stood up too slowly and judged your strength inaccurately. If you had fired two more spheres immediately after the first two, then they would have gone through the door and the girl would have been heavily injured if not dead!”

Ye Chong nodded in agreement. “Right, right, I could have also...” The two began a heated discussion.

It was when they thought meal time was approaching, they ended the interesting conversation.

Ye Chong got up, put on his windbreaker and headed out.

As he entered the main hall, it was indeed almost meal time. This was something Ye Chong always looked forward to and another would be the topic of the conversation he had earlier with Mu.

Ye Chong was about to head towards the dining table when all of a sudden, Wan Ziqing who was holding a cup of boiling hot sweet grass drink approached in his direction. He was about to bump into Ye Chong but Ye Chong took a step to the side to avoid the collision. A trace of slyness flashed in Wan Ziqing’s eyes as he

pretended to exclaim in surprise and lost hold of the cup. The boiling hot sweet grass drink splashed onto Ye Chong.

Ye Chong gave Wan Ziqing a death stare. The opponent's hostility was apparent, but what confused Ye Chong the most was the reason behind him resorting to such a harmless approach. Even if the sweet grass drink splashed onto him, it would not hurt him. Could it be that there was some corrosive poison in the drink?

Although Ye Chong could not comprehend his act, he was certain of the other party's hostility and so, Ye Chong did not hesitate to take his next move.

He stepped lightly on tiptoe and moved like a ghost to Wan Ziqing's other side. His right hand struck like lightning and grasped Wan Ziqing in the throat tightly ready to finish him off. Ye Chong was certain that he could even break a steel beam as thick as his throat!

Ye Chong pushed the thought of strangling him away. Instead, he pushed Wan Ziqing hard as he simultaneously jumped backwards with the tip of his toes.

Wan Ziqing felt regretful. Even though he survived that fight, he knew well that no one would be left alive with that much force on the throat. Wan Ziqing held his throat and knelt at a corner, coughing vigorously with petrified eyes. Ye Chong's strength was such that even though he had opted for a push instead of a chokehold, Wan Ziqing still bled a little from his mouth even though his throat survived the attack. The man was obviously hurt.

Vella had his eyes on Ye Chong the moment he left his room. He understood why Wan Ziqing did his little trick, although he cursed inwardly. "Why didn't you carry out a background check on that man before attempting such a ridiculous trick? If he is one that prioritises his physical appearance, he wouldn't retaliate. But the man you planned an attack on, he had skills of a professional killer!



Are you plotting your own death?

Out of desperation, Vella unholstered his heat ray guns from his thighs and shot between the two men! Vella did not intend to aim his shot at Ye Chong. He only wanted Ye Chong to back off and cool down the situation.

Wang Weiqi was reminded of the scene of her horrible experience earlier and screamed in fear!

Wang Weiqi's sharp scream gathered everyone's attention. As they noticed her terrified expression, they followed her gaze and saw Ye Chong standing proudly in a corner of the dining hall with Wan Ziqing kneeling in fear and Vella standing at a distance with his gun in hand as though he was facing an enemy.

The crowd exploded in mayhem!

Vella groaned and hoped that the enemy would not release his anger on him next. Else, his life would probably end today!

Ye Chong did not take the heat ray gun in Vella's hands seriously. His windbreaker could withstand a shot from any shooting weapon of grades 10k and below. The Black Cove's manufacturing workmanship was truly astounding!

Ye Chong made a move.

Old Mr Wang sensed the precarious situation and stepped forward. If there was anyone Ye Chong would not wish to harm, it would definitely be the oldest of them, Old Mr Wang.

Old Mr Wang coughed softly. "Young man, the boy did not know better but I believe he's had his punishment. Perhaps you should let him go now, what do you say?"

Mu knew exactly what Ye Chong was thinking. "That's enough, Ye, think of it as a lesson for him. Besides, you've eaten so much of their food without paying!"

Ye Chong inquired in his mind, "Mu, does food require

payment?” Ye Chong did not have a single Zuan on him as all of his gold Zuan were left in his room on Black Cove.

Mu was close enough to fainting after knowing his obliviousness. “Heavens Ye! Have you always been eating for free? Don’t you know you have to pay for things?”

Ye Chong whispered, “I only know that you have to pay to buy mechs. Besides, I don’t think I’ve bought anything before!” Ye Chong recalled his memories.

Mu gave him a long lecture and finally made Ye Chong understand that the concept of bartering for goods.

While the idea was not in line with Ye Chong’s beliefs, he still agreed after much repetitive admonishment and advice. “I’ve never seen the iron lizard giving anything in exchange for the crimson newts,” Ye Chong muttered to himself. Of course, Mu completely ignored that thought of his!

Old Mr Wang was wise and incredibly clear-headed. Ziqing was usually a steady man and would not act as rashly as today. Usually, situations like these were related to his beloved granddaughter. Old Mr Wang looked at his granddaughter. As expected, Qi’er looked panic-stricken. How could he not understand his own granddaughter? He immediately realized that his granddaughter must have had a bad encounter with the newcomer. Ziqing wanted to do her a favour by making a fool of the guests to cheer her up! “Sigh, it was so insensible of the two youngsters. Now look at the damage that has been done!” It seemed that Ye Chong still treated him with some respect and now Old Mr Wang had to step up and said a few words. This whole incident was definitely due to Qi’er. Besides, he could not just stand aside and watch Ziqing die before him!

Ye Chong stood where he was in perfect silence.

No one dared to break the silence for fear of awakening the demon.

Sweat beaded on Vella's forehead gradually soaking his hair and dripping onto the floor. He felt as though Ye Chong was always watching him with his cold glare. He was afraid to stare straight into the murderous stare from the silver eyes behind the black mask. He was very, very afraid that he would die in the next second!

Vella felt like a fish trapped in a net, unable to move.

There was pin drop silence. The bizarre atmosphere filled the dining hall, creating an immense pressure on everyone present.

Abruptly, Ye Chong spoke, "Since you have fed me earlier, I'll let it go this time. If there is a next time, do not hope for mercy!" His final intonation added a chilling effect to the entire dining hall. After giving his thought, Ye Chong went straight for the dining table and sat down.

Everyone breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Vella panted desperately and his body was thoroughly soaked with sweat. He had never felt so tired before. Vella strenuously placed his gun back into the holster.

At the dining table, everyone went mute. They ate in silence. No one was brave enough to sit within three meters away from Ye Chong. Even Vella hid far away in a corner. Wang Weiqi and Wan Ziqing returned to their rooms to rest and to recover from their shock. Moreover, Wan Ziqing had sustained major injuries.

The oppressive atmosphere continued on at the dining table.

Ye Chong did not notice anything else but only focused on eating. Compared to the monotonous food on the trash planet, the delicacies here were enough to make him forget about everything else!

Old Mr Wong grinned. "Young man, where would you like to land?" Everyone perked up their ears at that moment. Most of the passengers on the starship were medical volunteers and they were

dearly appreciated. Hence, Ye Chong's callous nature made them loath him very much. However, upon realizing that Ye Chong could kill for something as petty as that trick, they quickly hid their thoughts and continued eating in silence.

Ye Chong gobbled his food without stopping and spoke with a full mouth, "Where are you heading?"

Old Mr Wang kept his smile on and answered, "We're heading towards Blue Ocean! If you're leaving before that, we can fly you to your destination!" Everyone gave a surprised look at Old Mr Wang and immediately returned to their meal. Unfortunately, Ye Chong was too focused on his meal that he did not notice their odd behaviour. He replied carelessly, "Oh, then I'll head to Blue Ocean!"

Almost everyone gave a positive reaction to that.

# Chapter 55: New to Blue Ocean

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They arrived at Blue Ocean planet. Ye Chong walked on the streets with his mask taken off. Without exposure to a star's rays in the recent past, Ye Chong's face seemed to be fairer than usual. Ye Chong could not bear to give up his windbreaker for it was of good quality and definitely comparable to the high grade protective clothing. His black windbreaker, fair skin, balanced and trimmed body with his cool expression all gave Ye Chong a very distinctive look and that drew attention of many beautiful ladies on the street.

Ye Chong walked expressionlessly on the streets but on the inside, he was actually having a heated discussion with Mu.

Ye Chong was amazed by the soaring skyscrapers, modern architecture, and flying vehicles of all sorts traversing through the skies. The most novel feature for Ye Chong was the number of people around - whether it was on the trash planet or on Reno or Black Cove, Ye Chong had never seen so many people in his life!

However, that was not what Ye Chong and Mu were immensely discussing about.

“Mu, I'm so hungry! There're no mutants around here and how can you call a small creature like that a mouse? What a disgrace to its species! It's not even as a starter! If the people of trash planet knew something like that was their own kin, they would probably wipe out these petty creatures!” Ye Chong was incensed.

Mu felt helpless. “Ye, I can't do much to help you. Why didn't you carry gold Zuan at all times? All that gold Zuan would have been able to feed you well for years!”

Ye Chong looked at his naked hands. All the expert level mechs were left in his room. The asteroid belt was hazardous and Ye Chong had left all the dimension keystones in his room since they interfered with his hand movements. If only he had one now, it

would at least be enough to last him for awhile.

“Sigh, why did I leave them all in my room?” Ye Chong regretted.

Mu was also dejected. “It won’t be for long until all my energy drains out too!”

Ye Chong thought, “With my level of expertise, it’s probably not a problem to do some mech maintenance and modification work, right?”

Mu was encouraged. “That’s not a bad idea. With me by your side, there should not be a problem!” The mech was already looking forward to the good times ahead with eyes shining in anticipation.

“But, where are the mech repair shops?” Ye Chong’s practicality dragged Mu back from his fantasies. Mu muttered, “That is a good question. You can always ask someone around.”

“Ask someone?” Ye Chong replied in agreement, “That’s a good idea!”

After Ye Chong’s blank expression frightened off five passersby, even the usually insensitive Ye Chong felt discouraged. “Do I really look that scary? Your ugly look is not your fault but scaring people with your ugly look is!” Mu decided to ignore Ye Chong’s furious glare at him.

An old man was walking slowly ahead of them.

Ye Chong grew enthusiastic and ran to greet the old man with a smile. “Grandpa, may I ask you about something?”

If the few passersby from before saw Ye Chong as he was now, they would surely be quite surprised. Mu was already used to his demeanour - Ye Chong seemed to have an uncanny affinity for older people, as well as a special connection with them. He would be inexplicably polite to the elderly which is his usually indifferent expression shifting to a modest smile. Mu was also very surprised when he first observed the change in Ye Chong.

The mech eventually got used to it.

The old man glanced with interest at Ye Chong. “There’re not too many polite young people nowadays. You’ve got a question? Certainly, what would you like to know about?”

Polite? Mu could not help but rolled his eyes.

Ye Chong resisted the urge to bash Mu in the head and continued modestly, “Grandpa, I’d like to ask if there are places that offer mech maintenance and modification services nearby?”

“Mech maintenance and modification?” The old man thought for a moment, and pointed towards a street on the left. “Head in that direction and in about two minutes, there’ll be one and a few more further down the road but you’ll have to search for them carefully!”

After bidding farewell to the old man, Ye Chong proceeded towards the suggested location in haste!

Ye Chong left a few repair shops without any offers. The shopkeepers that laid their eyes on Ye Chong noticed his age and shook their heads with the same thought, “A modification mechanic as young as this? Don’t joke around! For his age, remembering the names of all the parts in a mech is already commendable! Looking for a job? Ah, no, we’re not hiring anyone!”

Ye Chong could not remember the number of times he was rejected. He may look expressionless on the outside, but he was very much disappointed on the inside. Mu was also dispirited, had downcast eyes and felt too tired for words!

Ye Chong did not know where he was, but no matter the location, Ye Chong felt that it did not make a difference.

“Ah, say, Mu, why should we abide by the rules? Are we to starve to death? I’ve never heard of the iron lizard trading when it is hunting!” Ye Chong could not help but complained to Mu!

“That’s the behavior of beasts! You’re a human, not a beast!” Mu explained tiredly.

“It doesn’t matter, I don’t think there’s any difference between humans and beasts. I think I’m more accustomed to the way of beasts!” Ye Chong shrugged disapprovingly. He did not really understand Mu’s insistence in this, but he still wished to give his utmost support!

Mu was silent for a moment before speaking again and this time in a serious tone, “Ye, you’re in a new society now. You abide by their rules or you will be rejected by them. Do you want to return to trash planet? Ye, you’ll get used to it. Just give yourself some time to adapt to this new lifestyle”

Ye Chong was a little moved by those words and pondered on them without noticing where he was heading to.

Suddenly, there came a few garbled voices from in front of him and an old man’s horrible cry.

Ye Chong was brought out of his musings and lifted his eyes to look ahead. Was that not the old grandpa who showed him the way earlier? He now lay down on the ground where a few weird looking teenagers were constantly kicking at him. One of them shouted domineeringly, “F\*ck, I asked for money and you dared to say no until I had to lay my hands on you! You old prune! Now you know the consequences!”

The same young man made a signal at a blonde haired teenager, and he immediately bent over to search the old man. The elderly curled himself into a ball, determinedly shielding his chest.

The other boy could not pry open the old man’s hands and shouted in anger, “You dead ol’ sh\*t! F\*ckin’ want your money and not your life isn’t it so? Then I’ll give you a hand!” He pulled out a dagger and made a stab right into the old man.

Ye Chong was furious. Anger burned within his chest until he



could not bear it much longer and with a yell, he walked towards their direction quickly and got in between the young hooligans. Ye Chong was fast and the hooligans could only notice a shadow before they felt hands tightening their throats. Their vision went black and became unconscious.

Ye Chong moved incredibly fast such that the sound of rupturing throats of the hooligans were almost simultaneous.

Fortunately, that area was secluded and only a few passersby witnessed the scene. All of them watched in fear and picked up their pace, wishing to get as far away from the scene as possible.

Mu was still indulged in the excitement, “Ah, so that’s what it’s like to give a helping hand to someone in need!”

His intent of killing the teenagers revoked after releasing his anger.

Mu had a thought. “Ye, let’s get the old man out of here now. If the intel from the virtual net was accurate, the police will here in a few minutes! They seem to be difficult to deal with!”

“Police? Difficult to deal with?” Ye Chong asked but Mu hurried him. “Quick, now, or hide somewhere close so we can see what the police look like!” The idea immediately won Ye Chong’s approval. Ye Chong lifted the old man and found that he was in a semi-conscious state. The old man’s face was bruised all over with a few bruises, looking very pitiful!

With all concern, Ye Chong asked, “Is he alright?”

Mu replied, “He’s alright. Just slightly concussed and the wounds are only superficial. It’s nothing serious.”

Ye Chong was relieved at that, and ran to far a corner, climbed and perched on a large tree. He spied from between the leaves where the hooligans were lying on the ground.

As expected, after a few moments, a blue, white and black flying vehicle flew to the scene. From the vehicle, three men in uniform

emerged. Ye Chong watched them curiously as they inspected each body carefully. On the other hand, Mu was quickly recording all the information he could get and updating the intel he obtained from the virtual net.

Ye Chong suddenly thought of something and felt a great regret. “Mu, we forgot to search the bodies for spoils! They might have Zuan on them!”

Mu consoled Ye Chong. “If they did, I don’t think they would have a lot. Otherwise, why would they be robbing off people?”

Ye Chong thought that was reasonable and he was no longer upset.

The three police officers inspected the bodies in a proficient manner and felt a deep chill from their findings. The victims had their eyes wide open as though unable to believe that they were already dead. Their soft throats were obviously marked with a gaping hole.

The youngest of the officers spoke, “Brother Fei, these people all suffered from crushed vertebrae at their necks. They died just recently!”

Another middle-aged officer added, “Brother Fei, I know these people. They’re lackeys for the local ringleader, Leng San and were usually quite rampant!”

The one they called Brother Fei noticed finger impressions around the gaping holes. “Hmm, they died from their throats being squeezed with someone’s bare hands.”

The other two were astonished. “Brother Fei, someone’s bare hands? Surely you’re exaggerating!”

Brother Fei lit a cigar and leisurely exhaled a puff smoke. The smoke swirled around in the air as he muttered to himself, “I hope that the ruthless bastard was only passing by! If not...” After a long pause, he suddenly spoke to the middle-aged officer, “Xin, report

this to Leng San. I'm warning that he better take control of himself. If he dares to make a fuss over this, he better watch out for the consequences." His expression beyond the smoke was unreadable as the middle-aged officer acknowledged his orders.

Brother Fei spoke to the other younger officer, "Zai, check out if there are any unfamiliar faces in the area or any suspicious people. Remember, do not take any action without my orders. Don't let him know that we're on to him!"

The young and excited Zai replied, "I'll remember it, Brother Fei! Don't worry! I'll find out about the bastard!"

The smoke from the cigar swirled in unpredictable patterns before Brother Fei's eyes. The police officer seemed to be certain that this was just the beginning of a serious case.

## Chapter 56: New Life

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“Ye, I mean, the black coat is a cool idea but it’s not cool especially after you got flour all over it.”

“Hey Ye, you can’t get customers with that long face you put on! It scares them away!”

“Ugh, Ye, what do you think you are doing with the chopping board? No, you are disassembling it! Gosh! Could you spare our chairs some mercy? We need those to work!”

“Aww man!”

...

This hectic scenario had reoccurred a few times yet Grandpa Qian had hardly blamed Ye Chong, instead he smiled and continuously encouraged him to keep the young man going.

Practice certainly makes perfect. As time went by, Ye Chong’s noodle-making skills dramatically improved. The texture of the noodles got better and better. He was able to utilize his fearsome strength constructively to create the most springy noodle in a place that had earned compliments from almost every customer that came to the shop. In addition, Grandpa Qian’s smile and constant motivation were eventually able to melt the ice between him and Ye Chong as the indifference in his expression faded away. He had changed so much that he would sometimes take the initiative to head out and get more customers. On some occasions, the elderly would take Ye Chong along for a shopping day as he would also introduce some of his old friends to the boy.

Their relationship progressed as they had grown fond of each other. It somehow became a habit later to have the boy by his side whenever he was heading out. Ye Chong had gotten used to such a lovely life. There was no stress. He didn’t have to stay outrageously alert at all times and found the long-lost comfort in

it. His life might be mundane but he was happy with it.

However, Ye Chong's training was not put on hold because of living in tranquility. Ever since the breakthrough he had made in his marble training back at Black Cove, controlling more than 10 marbles at once was no more of an issue for him, in fact, he picked up fairly quickly after that. Surprisingly, he had managed to control up to 13 marbles by then. His daily fitness training was carried on vigorously under Mu's guidance. It was as if he was born for such style of training. His strength rose sharply yet his muscle remained the same size ever. And this would be the whole point! The increase in strength would ought to lead to an increase in muscle size. It is unavoidable for any ordinary person. Thus, when muscle strength reaches saturation point, the body muscle would be at its largest too. This would radically reduce the overall movement and agility of your body in the long run. Hence, it became an issue on how one should boost one's strength without influencing one's body size. Vitality might be one's source of velocity, it still doesn't necessarily mean that one would possess velocity after obtaining vitality. This could be clearly justified by the dexterity problem a bulkier body would cause.

To remedy such issue, the group in Black Cove committed the use of silver liquid as a form of simulation to inhibit muscle growth at last, while combining the ancient martial arts.

It might be an ongoing issue for anyone who sought both strength and speed but it was non-existent to Ye Chong himself. The reason being no matter how hard he had trained and how much his strength had improved, his body would always remain the way it was from the beginning. Hence, Mu, intrigued as he was, mapped out a gruesome or even forbidding training course for this boy with such a unique talent.

While Ye Chong was taking his brutal training like a man, Mu seemed stuck in the virtual world, for whatever unspoken reason it was. He was rather mysterious of his whereabouts.

It was quite fortunate for Ye Chong that his noodle business got better and better. Imagine the vast expenditure that mainly revolved around Mu's resupply of energy monthly without any form of proper income. To top that off, it also costs another fortune to fill Ye Chong's bottomless appetite. He might have to put up the shutters and be in debt anytime soon if his noodles were not selling like hot cakes.

Though the days lapsed in hustles and bustles, Ye Chong was feeling absolutely content!

On the other hand, the punks appeared to have run for their lives after Ye Chong demonstrated his terrifying force. They seemed to have disbanded the gang, like animals in a forest fire. No one since then had ever dared threat to lay claim the gang's monthly protection fee from the poor residents, which was quite costly too.

...

Sun Xuelin and Shew, her cousin, were rotting at home. The parents were out. But what about food? Both of them had barely any experience in cooking their own meals before. They were both troubled.

"Shewie, why don't we have some noodles at Grandpa Qian's shop? His noodles aren't bad you know?" Suggested Xuelin.

"Noodles?" Shew frowned and seemed to not like the idea, "Are you sure? But... We don't seem to have other choice..."

They went to Grandpa Qian's shop. "Welcome!" Right after they stepped into the shop, Grandpa Qian greeted them as he chuckled, "Xuelin my girl, it's been a while since you had my noodles here. What made you come here today out of a sudden?"

"Hahaha..." She laughed along, "Oh well, it can't be helped. My parents are not at home today. We could only come here instead. Oh by the way..." She dragged Shew to the front of him, "This is my sister, Shew. I usually call her Shewie."

“Such a posh lady! Xuelin, I guess she can’t be your sister, can she? With such posh making a striking contrast to your nature! Hahaha, alright, what would you like to have today? The usual course for my tough girl? What about you, my gentle lady?” Shew was uncontrollably blushing as he complimented.

Sun Xuelin replied, “Yeah, the same for me. Shewie, what do you want to have?”

“Umm... Sis...” She whispered, “I’ll have the same as yours then!”

The elderly chuckled again, “That would be two bowls of beef noodles alright! Ye, two beef noodles for the ladies here!” Grandpa Qian shouted towards the kitchen and a voice that was not loud but clear came responding afterwards, “Got it!”

“What?” Xuelin staggered a little, “Grandpa, you got an assistant already? When was this? Why did I never know about this?”

He answered pleasingly, “He’s not an assistant. Ye is a distant relative of mine. Well you know how an elderly like me would need a companion sometimes. Living alone was such a tough chore for me. So I called him here!” Grandpa Qian had repeated these lines countless times to countless customers whenever Ye Chong was mentioned. Somehow at some point, he felt that he had been telling the truth all this while as Ye Chong really felt like a part of his family.

A moment later, Ye Chong exited the kitchen with two bowls of steaming beef noodles on the tray. Even though his expression still appeared a bit bland, people could see the fickle joy on his face sometimes. He walked to the table of the ladies, laid his noodles in front of them, “Enjoy!”, and dashed back to the kitchen after that.

Xuelin had a taste and was as amazed as before, “Wow! This is still very great!” She praised on, “Grandpa, these noodles were better than the one you made! The texture was too good!” Grandpa Qian looked proud as he responded, “It certainly is. Ye has

standard in his cooking! Anyone would have complimented too after tasting his dishes!” He smiled broadly, as if he’s the one being praised.

The amazement continued as Xuelin saw the extremely thin slices of beef on top the noodles, “This is very good treatment! The slicing skill is impeccable!” Oh how joyful the old man was, he smiled with eyes narrowing into a slit, “Ye, my boy! You heard that? The customer praised your skills!”

“Oh why thank you!” Ye Chong replied and shook his head. Grandpa was always such a messenger. He just has to reiterate the compliments to me right after the customer. Man, wouldn’t he get fed up of this? Ye Chong thought so, yet he smiled for a brief moment. The corners of his lips somehow raised themselves. He sniggered as he proceeded with rolling the dough before him.

As he rolled on, he spoke in his mind, “Mu, what are you doing?”

It took a while for Mu to come up with a reply, “I am currently engaged in something right now. Just keep the dough rolling!” His voice trailed off. He seemed to have vanished right after his reply.

Ye Chong wondered what Mu had been doing in the virtual world these days. He thought maybe he should get online again someday. It’s been a while since his last NRS training. I wonder if those elders at Aurora were doing great all these while...

He kneaded the dough energetically.

...

Glancing at the report in his hand, he lighted a cigar... the smoke of confusion wafted through the atmosphere as Brother Fei tried to figure out the situation.

According to the outcome of Zi’s latest scouting, only Grandpa Qian’s shop had a newcomer and everyone who had eaten at his place informed that the newcomer happened to be his distant relative of his who pleaded him for a living and also happened to



have great cooking skills.

Hopefully he wasn't the culprit of my men's death... or else...

He breathed heavy as he worried. His room was veiled by the smoke of his ponders. Things could hardly be seen.

Leng San stood upright in silence, as his eyes wavered upon the corpses before him. The menacing face of his had not much of an expression, other than the growing grimness in his eyes. He tried to hold his eyes but he couldn't hold it in any longer, when his sight landed upon the corpse in the middle. The stern face of his shattered. His cheeks were trembling as misery took over his face. He couldn't hide it. He stared at this particular corpse. Tears overflowed his eyes and they streamed silently down his face, landing on the floor like an atomic bomb to his heart.

The corpse... was his brother, his own brother. He had been trying his best to keep the identity of his brother in secret all along, for he wouldn't want his brother to be affected as he was well-aware that he could be dead anytime, anywhere in the future since he had created too many enemies over the course of time. So his brother was disguised as a simple underling of the gang. Unquestionably it was a successful disguise and his brother had remained unharmed all these years.

But then... The corpse placed in front of him being actually his brother... he could not believe every part of this, especially when his brother was killed by having his throat crushed with bare hands. How could this not be heartbreaking to Leng San? How could this not be depressing enough to shatter his soul?

It was rare to have men with such immense strength in this place. There's no way he could not find this man out! If he ever found that man, he's going to break all his bones and grind him into dust! He would make sure that man would be in torment forever! Leng San gravely promised, gritting his teeth.

The crew outside were finding their boss strange today. For some

reason, the usual frigidity on his face went missing after seeing the corpse in the morgue. And he had shut himself inside ever since. It had been so long yet he never seemed to be coming out anytime soon.

Did something happen to our leader? The few remaining men of his wereworried.

Shush! The door opened and Leng San came out with a pair of reddened eyes. His voice was coarse as he mumbled, “Go! Go and find that man!”

# Chapter 57: Inspector Fei

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Ye Chong started his day early in the morning. Well, since Grandpa Qian was very much old and he was no longer in good shape too, Ye Chong believed he should be working harder to keep the business running.

The sun gradually shone through the opened shutter of the noodle shop. Ye Chong peeked out of the entrance. The street at daybreak was still very much deserted. There were a few pedestrians at most. Ye Chong's finger swiped the switch on the wall, turning on the air purifier which started rumbling a little upon activation. Clouds of ionized water droplets were then being ejected from the machine, creating refreshing air to breathe. A moment later, the interior of the shop became cozier. Such an efficient air purifier was not cheap to begin with, but it was purchased by Grandpa Qian using part of the year-end bonus he received from the government - just to improve the environment of his shop.

The floor of the shop might had been made out of nano materials and was indeed dust-proof, but daily cleaning was still required to provide customers an enjoyable environment while dining in.

The interior of the shop was furnished with 8 metallic buddings, which would bloom like an actual flower upon touching the tip of it. Inside, there would be 4 sets of table and chairs with 1 set at each petal. The chairs were connected beneath through the frames right to the center platform of the budding. The silvery glossy platform in the middle was size adjustable and there lay the cashier connected to the processor in the customer's table. So they could proceed with the checkouts directly even when they are still seated after their meals.

At the corner of the shop there was also an automated noodle maker, which was seldom used considering how the shop's reputation relied solely on hand-made noodles. There was simply

something in hand-made noodles that machine-made noodles could never compete with!

Previously, Grandpa Qian actually wanted a more of an old-fashioned design for his shop, like a wooden construction for example, but woods were absurdly pricy, so he threw out that plan at last.

While Ye Chong was sweeping the floor, Grandpa Qian seemed to have woken up too, as he walked in and began some other cleaning tasks as well.

Soon after they had done their cleaning, a middle-aged man set foot into the shop with a cigar in his mouth. "Fe..." Grandpa Qian halted, "Fei my boy is that you? Why the early visit today eh?" The man addressed as Fei replied, "Good morning Uncle Qian! Well I have some things to do today, so I came early." Fei seemed to be a frequent visitor here, as he picked a seat by the wall, "I'll take my usual place." Grandpa Qian was welcoming at first, till his sight fell upon the cigar in his mouth, "Fei! How many times have I told you! Do you know how harmful smoking these early in the morning is? Why won't you stop doing this? When will you ever learn from my advice and not your fatal mistake?"

Fei was alerted. He hurriedly removed the cigar in his mouth and attempted to act funny to let it slide, "Eh! I forgot about it! Hahahahahahaha, I'm so forgetful, am I not?"

"So what would our boy want to have today?" Grandpa Qian asked.

"I'll have some... plain noodles today, thanks Uncle Qian. Your noodles are sure something here you know? It's been quite a while since I came and I was missing your delicious noodles so much that I drooled!" He answered laughingly.

Grandpa Qian chuckled joyfully, "Though I'm getting old and I can't knead the dough as good as before... But luckily I still have Ye to make the noodles for me and he is so much better." He said it

proudly and ordered on top of his lungs, "Eh, Ye! Get a bowl of plain noodles for this boy here!"

"Okay." Ye Chong responded flatly.

"You have a new guy here, Uncle Qian?" Fei asked in bewilderment.

"Nah, he's just a distant relative of mine. I was feeling a bit lonely, you know, old man problems. So I brought him here."

Out of curiosity Fei asked on, "Where does he come from then?"

"Uhh..." Grandpa Qian flinched, "Somewhere... somewhere far, far away!" Muttered he.

"Ahahaha..." Fei tried to lighten the atmosphere, "Sigh, the silly habit of my job again. Please don't mind me, Uncle Qian."

"Grandpa!" Ye Chong's voice rang from the inside, "We are out of corianders!" Grandpa Qian gasped and tapped his head, "How could I forget this! Sigh, we can't be out of corianders! We need this!" Mumbled the elderly. He then shouted towards the kitchen again, "Ye, I'm heading out to get some corianders now! Don't forget to serve our customer okay?" Ye Chong okayed and the elderly waddled out of the shop after that.

Ye Chong then served Fei a bowl of plain noodles a moment later. Placing it on the round table, he concisely greeted the customer, "Enjoy!"

As he turned and walked away, "Eh!" Fei called him, "Hey brother, your name, Ye, was it?"

Ye somehow felt discomfort seeing the man before him. There was not only discomfort but also a little bit of familiarity. He carried on with a concise response, "Yes." And he tried to walk away again.

"So, you are the one who killed those men that day..." Fei lighted his cigar again, he spoke on relaxingly, "Aren't you?"

Ye Chong's eyes rapidly turned cold. He could sense danger behind the line as he finally realized that the very man before him was one of the police officers he spotted that day. That's why I'm feeling this much of hazard! Ye Chong didn't know many ways to resolve a risky situation like this. Strangling was the only one he knew and used the most. Without much hesitation, his instinct ordered him to conduct the method immediately.

His body waved to the front and his right hand reached Fei's throat with lightning speed. The airwaves created as he propelled broke through the veil of smoke surrounding Fei.

I was right after all! As he saw the changes in Ye Chong's expression, Fei's speculation was justified. He didn't come unprepared of course, but Ye Chong's speed was something not included in his plan, as a result he was barely able to block Ye Chong's attack with his arm.

"Hmph!" Ye Chong clenched his right hand and launched it at Fei's blocking arm.

A crippling blow, followed by the sounds of crushed bones and a groan after. Fei's face turned pale as Ye Chong's fist literally just smashed his arm. The broken bone pieces gashed out of his ruptured muscle. Fei had cold sweat over his trembling body while his right hand was permanently disabled. The attack wasn't ending anytime soon as Ye Chong raised his fist again while Fei was frozen with helpless vulnerability. Fei's soon-to-be last words were, "Uncle Qian! Hey there!"

It actually worked.

Ye Chong stumbled and held his punch. Right at that moment, Fei quickly backed away from Ye Chong and leaned against the wall, wheezing.

Ye Chong took a look to his rear - Grandpa Qian wasn't there! He hadn't returned! Liar! His sight lay on Fei once more, with a frigid glare.

"If... If you..." Fei, catching his breath, as he was trying to word something, "If you killed me... you are... not helping Uncle Qian!" A hint of hesitation flashed in Ye Chong's eyes. "If you killed me, the police... they will be here anytime. You could run... you could hide, of course the police can't get you, but they can get Uncle Qian, don't forget that!"

The first time he discovered his signature skill did not work out the way he wanted, he was already enraged. The bloodthirsty soul burned up high yet the sane soul told him to not kill the man in front as the man was right in his words.

And Mu emerged in his thoughts from out of the blue, "Ye, this is blatant threatening but it works most of the time!"

Of course it worked! That's why Ye Chong was very much angered. The person clearly was alarming to his sense of security, but he could not neutralize the threat at all! Cowardliness and helplessness were teasing him. His agitation built up over time.

"Ye..." Mu seemed to have sensed his emotion, "Don't panic. There's still a way."

"OF what kind?" Ye Chong spoke in his mind.

Mu sneered, "Hehehehe" and spoke on ominously, "In your language, that would be - smack the heck out of him, but don't kill him just yet!"

The advice was joyful to hear. He knew Mu wouldn't let him down as he pounced on Fei and literally smacked the heck out of Fei.

Wait, this shouldn't be it! Fei wasn't expecting resistance! Is Ye really a cold-blooded person? That he would not care about that old man at all? Did my info fail me?

The next scene was Ye Chong precisely landing a kick at Fei's stomach, with the tip of his foot. Well Mu did mention about keeping him half-dead and not utterly-dead. So Ye Chong's kick

this time was only 30% of his usual force yet Fei was rolling on the floor in pain. Ye Chong did not concern what the person would become after the violence, as long as he would stay alive. He punched and kicked, as every blow counted, just to unleash the annoyance this punching bag gave him all this while.

Poor Fei was getting distorted being hit to the ground... He would rather die! Or faint on the spot! But Ye wasn't aiming for the critical spot of his body to knock him out. Plus he was obviously holding back his strength at the perfect amount to make sure he stayed conscious while tasting every bit of the ache he received. His mentality warded himself from getting crazy over this everlasting torment, still, deep inside he regretted the presumptuous inspection this time so much. What a stupid mistake I made!

"Now... choke his neck, but don't suffocate him to death!" Another happy-go-lucky suggestion from Mu, as his tone went like the little devil brandishing the fork by Ye Chong's ears.

Ye Chong, without a doubt, did as he was told to.

"Okay, tell him that there's 52 policemen at his station. Make sure it sounds like a threat. It's a courtesy to return one's greeting." His devil wings excitingly fluttered.

Threat? How should I word it like a threat? That was not an issue for Ye Chong as it was an inborn ability within himself. The lines did not need much polishing and they came out uttering from his lips like a cold winter storm. The atmosphere was feeling tense as Fei shivered to what he heard, which felt like a blade against his neck.

"So I heard... you have 52 men back at your office." He spoke bluntly, "Fifty-two, huh?"

And that was the last straw to Fei's calmness.

"Oh and you do have a lovely wife and daughter, don't you? Who



happily stayed at Guang Hua garden N-14-328-24." He carried on his performance, "Your wife has such a good name, He Yan, named after the swallow; while your daughter is named after the tiny bloom of flower, Meng Rui Er, who happens to be 7 years old this year, am I right? Mr. Meng."

The rolling information that came struck like a thunder on Fei, shattering his last bit of sanity as he wriggled and screamed, "Who... Who are you! I warn, I warn you! Don't you ever dare to lay a finger on them! Or else... else... I'll... I'll make sure I'll destroy you!"

"Good. Kekeke, now he has learned his lesson. One last warning to make sure he does not simply threat an ordinary citizen like us, then you can let him go." The little devil signaled mercy on generosity.

"You better be not planning to do anything funny, or else... Hehehe I'll be the one." Fei could only laugh along bitterly, knowing his doom was destined. However, Ye Chong gestured to let him free.

Upon knowing such good news, Fei did not want to wait any longer, he struggled his way out, "Hold it!" Fei flinched... "Money. Pay for your food first." Pointing at the cold noodles on the table, Ye Chong nonchalantly demanded.

Beep.

Thank you and come again.

Fei wobbled out of the shop.

"So where did you learn this trick?" Ye Chong asked Mu.

"Hehehehe..." Mu laughed, "I watched some movies recently. This happens to be the typical scene."

"Then how did you even know the number of policemen at his station? And his home, too?"

"That's simple! Of course I sneaked into the station and hacked his profile out duh! Everything is written on it!"

"So this is what they called threatening? Why would it be more practical than killing him on spot? The Iron Lizard didn't seem to have used this trick before..." Ye Chong collected his mind, yet he was still in much bewilderment.

"Well, he's merely human, that's why!" Mu reminded.

## Chapter 58: Urban Fiasco

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Ye Chong finally summoned Mu back from the alternate dimension. It had been quite some time ever since Mu went out of order. Though Grandpa Qian owned a rather spacious accommodation, it still seemed cramped with Mu's gigantic mechanical body inside. Ye Chong had to readjust Mu's posture in order to fit him in. He folded his legs and placed the body in ... quite an eyesore pose on the ground. Mu was partially lying on the floor, with his legs lifted and... "What do you think you're doing?!", with his mouth rumbling.

Grandpa Qian sighed in sympathy as he laid his sight upon the torn body of Mu. Such a fine mech Ye had but became all broken by then. "What a pity!"

Well there wasn't any other Helmet to connect to the virtual world, other than the one in Mu's system. Ye Chong hopped into the cabin and put on the Helmet, logging in and there he went!

The virtual world stayed the same. The same old street, the same old crowd and the same old fields... A visit to his recent past. He knew where he would head to next. He glanced at the path and proceeded to Aurora to have a nice reunion. The elderlies at the Aurora pined for Ye Chong's revisit. Some of them were in bitter worries while waiting as they wondered if something had happened to their precious boy. It was their lucky day they thought as they were surprised by Ye Chong's return. A session of warm greetings happened between them and Ye Chong's smile broadened like a shrinking violet.

He bode farewell to the benevolent elderlies and shifted to the NRS training field. Of course, Mu had long vanished from his thoughts by then. Wonder where Mu had gone to this time?

The field was still vibrant as ever. The combat field was as entertaining as it used to be. Ye Chong was stirred up by the

fighting sequences occurring in the field. He missed the hand-on experience. One round... One round would do. Ye Chong got up, "Ye, I had just completed the creation of your identification documents." Mu was good with timing, like too good, "You have to get it now. It's much safer with it, gravely dangerous without it."

"Identification card? It's done?" It would be indeed better with formal identification, considering how Bai Linan seemed to be wetting himself upon hearing how Ye Chong did not even own one back at Reno. Speaking of Bai Linan, what had happened to that guy?

Ye Chong strolled the street alone. Several aircrafts and mechs zoomed by. They passed through the floating buildings in the anti-gravitational force field while flaunting some fancy tricks in their piloting.

He was stimulated by the action. His desire to pilot was struck in a whim. As his fingers slid to the keystone in his pocket and called up a F-58 in front. Ye Chong hopped in and impatiently launched the machinery.

The F-58 blasted off into the air and glided mischievously. Ye Chong played off some tricks in between. The mech sometimes would slide right across the windows of the floating window, which put the owner in cold sweat. "Eh, Ye!" Mu started his commentary, "This is bad. Tsk, tsk, tsk, what happened to your performance? It's as if our training had gone to waste. That flip you made just now was not smooth enough. And also your timing for acceleration has an inaccuracy of 5.78%! Are you an amateur or you're from the dump? Oh wait you are from a-"

A blue humanoid mech bolted by. And it just contemplated Ye Chong, waving its hand far ahead.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk. Ye, look at you, look at how fallen you had become." Mu carried on adding fuel to the fire, "Even a noob would come and pick on you in your face. Ye, please don't tell anybody

that I was the one who planned the training course for you. I am embarrassed enough."

"Hmph." Ye Chong snorted and sped up as he chased after that easy-peasy in front.

That blue mech was obviously modified for speed enhancement. The appearance justified everything - foldable wings, about 4 of them, would allow stability while traveling in the atmosphere; a sylphlike body and 6 additional wings smaller in size at the sides of the end. The modified mech looked like a giant bird spreading wings in the sky as it travelled, with its tiny body in the embrace of its large elaborated wings. A featherweight craft.

Every addition on this mech was about speed. Thus, it was unquestionable that this mech was superior in its speed.

But then, as Ye Chong looked through, this mech might as well be a piece of junk like those he saw back at his planet. It is a total failure. The mech did possess greater speed but that's all it had. Everything else than its speed was disturbingly terrible. Featherweight? More like paperweight. It had such a thin body that Ye Chong wondered if it could even take the slightest touch and if the pilot would break before the mech. The elaborated wings were unnecessary in his opinion and they were utterly useless once it set off into space. In an atmospheric zone, he would only need two wings at the side, with half the size of what this exaggerated hunk of metal had and maintained 80% of the current performance. Smaller wings would also reduce the likelihood of being struck by enemies effectively.

That was not it! The worst part of this crap is that this noob seemed to care about speed so much he forgot about the capacity. It was so limited that it could not even be loaded with anything else than the pilot himself. And what? It didn't even have its own weaponry? A mech without weaponry is only an escape pod with fancy wings. Ye Chong thought. But well, Mu was an exception to his rules.

Even though the mech did have some odd style of modification, it still cruised like a breeze.

F-58 is a mech for space-travels. So it does not have any wings at the sides, thus the underwhelming performance during travel in the atmosphere. Fortunately in exchange, it contains an advanced engine and with Ye Chong's first-class obstacle piloting skills, the F-58 did not lose out badly, in fact, it had always been right behind that blue mech.

It sounded cool. Still, it was just right-behind. Close, yet not close enough. It was tricky to overtake that blue mech.

Meanwhile, Mu was being extremely helpful at that moment, "Aw man. Ye, did you know you could have made this turn 0.035 second faster? Hm... Hey Ye! Oh my... Ugh... What had you even learned back at the NRS training? Oh wait, what do you even remember from the training? Did you forget everything else other than the fact that you lived? Did you know you are deplorably 4.5% below than the standard of performance I had set for you?"

The two mechs were flying in the city center. The floating houses were denser than the outskirts. There were more traveling crafts in the air too. It seemed that the blue mech right in front did not intend to be above the neighborhood, instead, he weaved in and out around the buildings.

Two of them raced on the road, one behind another, showing zero concern for traffic or any passerby. The center was chaotic. The pedestrians had their eyes hooked on the outrageous racers threading paths and they tripped themselves while dodging the fast and furious. The traffic on its peak-hour had been turned into a bumper, a splat of honking and craft-collisions.

In the meantime, Ye Chong never thought of the issue going off before him. Traffic chaos? You got to be kidding me! The sky is bloody boundless and bloody bright and you tell me you can't fly anywhere you want? Technically, the concept of order in traffic

had yet instilled in his mind during that time.

He was all-eyes-focused on the blue mech in the front of him. Intense! Exciting! It's been a while I got this driven! Ye Chong's blood was boiling with adrenaline stimulating every inch of his nerves. His body and his mind were all onto the inputs. The sluggish sequence at first started to get more and more seamless over the course. Slowly he picked up the sense of traveling at full speed. He began performing overwhelming dodges as he travelled like a swordfish winding in the corals, freely and happily.

Gradually the gap between Ye Chong and the opponent shortened.

The opponent seemed to have felt the stress exerted by Ye Chong as his action became a bit disorderly. The outsiders might not discern the difference but Ye Chong certainly did, every frame of it. He took the chance and shortened the distance even further. After the mistake the blue mech pilot made, he calmed himself down immediately. He would not be giving more opportunities to the F-58 behind! No more letups! As obvious the F-58 was inferior to his craft in terms of speed, Ye Chong managed to put up such a situation merely because of his ultimate piloting skills.

"Yawn..." Mu was bored by Ye Chong in all-focus, "What's the point of this race with zero expertise? If I want to watch something blindly speeding, I could watch mech commercials and not this."

"Mu, stop blabbering and help me take a look at the rear. There were some mechs behind." Ye Chong noticed something when he was occupied. He asked Mu to do the look-out for him.

Mu did notice the mechs tailing from afar. There were 3 mechs in pure black, white and blue respectively... and a white mech leading with a speed almost as fast as the F-58.

"Oh... It seems like they are from the police force." Mu observed carefully, "Well I have no idea what that white one does though. Ah, its specification wasn't as bad as your F-58... What?" Mu was

shocked out of sudden, "Ye, careful..." He turned serious, "That white mech right behind you, it is fully armed."

Ye Chong pondered a little. He had enough fun at the moment. Moreover, the white mech behind was sending chills down his spine.

Time to end the race! A sharp turn by Ye Chong, right into the other street. It was unexpected for the blue mech pilot till he was dazed for a second and nearly hit the building in front. The body of his mech brushed through the metal edges of the building and its integrity was breached, as what Ye Chong had pointed out. This mech did have an issue. He barely made it out alive. He rolled out of the cabin and was found surrounded by a horde of police mechs. He was caught red-handed.

Ye Chong's sudden change in route also stupefied the white mech behind. But he turned along without hesitation.

Ye Chong's heart skipped a beat upon seeing the white mech appearing behind again. This guy! He was really after me!

"Oh Ye, how lovely." Mu added, "This guy seems to have a thing for you, eh? Oh~ be careful, his weaponry seems to be activating." Yeah, Mu totally was joking. Not!

Traveling at maximum speed, Ye Chong took a lightning glance at the white mech projected in his interface. It seemed that the white mech had opened up its hidden artillery from within! The hostility was blatant!

With another sharp turn, he made right into extended street at the side. The white mech was unprepared for this and was left dazed again, but he made it up fairly quickly and chased on. The other crafts in the street were astounded by Ye Chong's intrusion as they ran for their lives steering clear of him. The place was in disarray. The panicked mech flocks blocked the white mech's way. He glared at Ye Chong getting out of sight in a few blinks.



Finally! Ye Chong let out a sigh of relief. He slowed down. Took a breath and moved on in relaxation.

Well, the race before had consumed massive amounts of energy. He had to slow down or he would be walking a gazillion miles home.

"Ye!" Mu's voice rang again, "Look at the sky!"

Ye Chong lifted the camera upon the sky. In horror he looked at the projection. The white mech was lurking in the sky, aiming the muzzle of his laser rifle at Ye Chong!

# Chapter 59: I'm not an Outlaw!

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Ye Chong was absolutely terrorized. He changed the direction of his engine in panic and landed the F-58 harshly. Zeep! The white laser skimmed through the forehead of F-58 and created a bottomless-looking crater on the ground, steaming.

The immense force made the F-58 land like a beast on four feet, to buffer the pressure produced due to sharp turning. And almost immediately after, the F-58 launched itself like a jaguar into the crowd.

Ye Chong had switched to ground-mode of the F-58 and considered himself familiar with the dynamics behind dashing by the beast. He mastered it fast and moved on fluidly. There was a certain rhythm in his running. The F-58 was also built with an avant-garde buffering system, so Ye Chong had an easier time piloting it on ground. Imagine bumping in the urban jungle without it, Ye Chong might need a comfort bag and all the measly amount of stamina left might just go into the drain along with his pukes.

The white mech was alerted by something as he stopped firing. He just silently followed Ye Chong behind.

Ye Chong had fully adjusted the F-58's posture after a while but remained very close to the ground, with legs bent. Certainly a very strange posture to fly in... Ye Chong was helpless of this in actuality. F-58 was unarmed and keeping the same height with the sniper would be fatal. He could only try to ground the sniper by flying extremely low. That was his mere hope to fight back or else... he would be running for his life and probably get shot and no more. There were a lot of moments where a shot could have been made, yet it never happened. Ye Chong was confused. What was holding him back? Or was it a miss?

Ye Chong would never let the chance slip if he was the chaser. He

would fire at every possible moment to nail the enemy. That was what living on the Trash Planet had taught him all these years - the blatant, crude, primal, supreme law of survival. He believed that such law might not be actually applicable in this society, especially after the incident the day before, but he believed that there were way more things unknown to him. He didn't encounter the unknown, he was literally thrown into the unknown. Thus, like what all humans would do, he would pick the method he trusted and knew best to conquer the unknown.

Well, it seemed like Ye Chong still had a long journey down the road to understand society and change himself...

The curved legs might appeared to be awkward, however it would be the most effective way so far to dodge any incoming beam by changing the course using the leap of the legs.

It could be a golden opportunity to have some circus tricks but Ye Chong did not fancy the idea. The non-orderly wavy leap, the classic Thomas's Spin, there are always times for those but not now! If I wanted to commit suicide there are better ways! Thought Ye Chong as he changed his direction from time to time between the densely grouped buildings at an attempt to confuse the opponent. This would give him temporary cover too!

The white mech seemed to have no counter for this. He stayed up high following Ye Chong. Ye Chong went lower and lower and tried his best to pick places with more buildings. That was a headache to the white mech because Ye Chong travelled like a phantom, sneaking from one spot to another. He would more likely to miss him if he were to lower his mech in the run.

Out of the blue, the black mech in front of him disappeared!

Ye Chong actually discovered a giant building in front, an extremely tall foundation. He got an idea and he rushed towards the corner of the building. Right when the white mech lost him, he jumped out of the cabin instantly and warped the F-58 back into

the alternate dimension before he touched the ground. The people were staring at him in perplexity. He quickly submerged into the crowd and vanished.

He walked with the flow and cautiously glanced at the white mech, halting in the sky a few times on the way, "You did improve I guess." Mu praised.

"Well, this is the best I could pull off." Ye Chong replied.

"The location to claim your card is right at the central building in 500 meters."

"Got it."

The central building was about 300 floors tall, coated in metallic texture with glasses of dim blue. It was a futuristic building in cold colors. And there seemed to be a parking space for mech or miniature aircrafts at every 3 floors.

The interior was gently lit, decorated with walls of silver and countless cubicles separated by partitions of glass both transparent and half-transparent. The lobby contained a number of hologram projectors that kept rolling out the procedures of any form of application. There were also a few processors nearby for customers' inquiry.

Ye Chong walked to one of the kiosks there. His fingerprints were scanned along with his retina, followed by his skeletal structure. A diprotic scan was also performed. These were the essential procedures for verification purpose. And Ye Chong's identity was proven.

"The application of recreating your identity card has been completed. You may receive your card at your right. Please take good care of it and if you lose it again, do come to us soon." A mechanical voice of a female rang at the kiosk after the verification process. Thup! A pale green card was spat out of the automated machine, "Have a nice day!"

He looked at his card with curiosity. It was about the size of his wrist, slightly smaller. "Ye, this is your identification document. You're no longer an outlaw. This took me way longer than I thought. The security at the residence info center was hard to get through. It took me a lot of effort just to get in. I almost got caught too! But luckily I'm fast." He laughed proudly.

The card contained his full name, gender and other personal information. There was also a unique logo of Fal galaxy. The identity card could be snapped after fingerprint verification to obtain the very core of the card, being the microchip. The chip could be placed into a specific kind of decoder to get more data. Well, of course, this was only useful for specific departments.

Ye Chong kept his card carefully.

He exited the building and headed back to his shop. The first wave of customers were coming anytime soon. He had got to make it back fast! He was tempted to re-summon F-58, yet... Ye Chong looked around. The white mech could be watching from anywhere. He wouldn't want another round of reckless race into the unknown...

For what reason that white mech wanted to kill me so much? What did I do wrong?

Ye Chong was puzzled. Some may have suggested the use of Mu but that idea was long out of reach for Ye Chong, considering how Mu was so sassy to not let him have a ride for emergencies. Sigh, I'll just walk on my feet. He ran on his feet fast, all the way to the shop!

The pedestrians at the side held their steps as they watched a road runner passing by.

"What the heck? This is impossible!"

"He's too fast!"

"Am I high? Am I seeing things?"

They were probably thinking these thoughts while looking at a grown man rushing through the street in rumbles.

Ye Chong had to rush because the customers flooded the shop recently and most of them happened to be regular and returning customers.

I made it!

Right before the first wave of starving customers intruded.

That was a miracle, until... I'm tired... The customers of the shop were very self-aware of it seemed. There were only 32 seats in Grandpa Qian's shop. So anyone could tell the seats were very insufficient and the customers left the moment they finished their food. They never stayed and they gave the seats to the coming customers. It was good but... that simply did not give a moment for Ye Chong to even catch his breath. He was usually much more energetic, however he drained himself too much during the escape in the morning.

"You seemed worn out, my boy. Are you okay?" Grandpa Qian asked unsettlingly upon seeing how Ye Chong was not his usual self. "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine." That was his reply for every regard he received that day.

Till the very last customer left in satisfaction, they finally got to start their meal.

The rice tasted sweeter than usual. Everything just felt tastier. Ye Chong gargled the soup.

In the midst of leisure, someone bashed into the place.

# Chapter 60: Mechanics

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Sun Xuelin dragged Shew into the place as she pushed the door open,. "Grandpa Qian!" Shouted Xuelin as soon as she stepped in, while her cousin was concealing herself behind. She wiped her face reddened by intense workouts and swiped her hazel fringe dampened by her sweat. Droplets of sweat rolled off like dewdrops in the morning. Her nose glossing in her youth were exhaling heavily. The formerly tight uniform covering her body had lost its formality by then, which the neckline had been unbuttoned while the sleeves had been outrageously raised, revealing arms of fair beauty. Her left hand was holding Shew's hand while her right was smudged by something.

"Grandpa Qian! We want two bowls of beef noodles! The usual!" She then tugged her cousin all the way to the hand cleaner at the side. Beep! A flow of air slightly warm passed through their fingers. The black patches on her hands slid through the tips of her fingers and fell into the opened doorway to the disposer.

"Xuelin?" Laid his chopsticks, Grandpa Qian stood up and looked at them in anxiety, "What happened to my girls? Looking all flustered..."

Ye Chong in the meantime had already shifted to the kitchen and started cooking.

Xuelin pulled her beloved Cousin Shew to the table and sat down right beside Grandpa Qian, giggled, "Sigh! You won't believe what had happened! I was getting home with Shewie, all happy and lucky. But then the mech just had to break itself out of a sudden. The worst thing was I actually broke my dimensional keystone too. I tried to fix it on my own but it didn't work. I got hungry so I decided to come back here for another meal first." Such a bad hair day for the girls. Grandpa Qian thought.

"So is the mech right outside the shop?" He poured them some

water as he asked.

"Ugh!" Xuelin gargled angrily, "Yeah! I never expected things could go wrong when it's just a stone's throw away from our house! This is depressing... especially when my parents aren't in too!" And she sighed again but seemed more agitated than depressed.

Grandpa Qian chuckled, "Xuelin, my girl, you sure act like your father. Why aren't you like your mother even a little? Eh, drink it slower. Do it gently, Xuelin. The drinks are all yours. Be like your cousin, Shew. Look at how gently she made her sip."

Shew while on her sip was embarrassed by the compliments. She blushed and almost choked herself. "It's... It's nothing." She placed down her cup, "I mean, Xuelin looks pretty good too, doesn't she?" Rubbing her hands together while slipping her fingers through as she muttered.

"You are just the shy kind, aren't you?" Grandpa Qian was delighted. Shew's blush had gotten worse. "Yeah, she's the shy kind ever since she was a child!" Stated Xuelin while she laughed.

A moment later, Ye Chong left the kitchen with two bowls of noodles. He placed it in front of the girls, sat down and continued digging in. Courtesy was no longer the best policy for Ye Chong when hunger was concerned. He had consumed too much stamina for the day. Hunger had taken over his mind. Nom. Nom. Nom... Ye Chong was too busy emptying every bowl he got.

Xuelin and Shew held their chopsticks in daze. Is this a human? How many bowls has he eaten ever since we came in? The 7th? Or the 8th? Can a man get this hungry? It was not only because the amount he had eaten, it was also the rate of him finishing the bowls. The noodles appeared as if they were disintegrating rapidly the moment Ye Chong's lips reached the edge of the bowl. Seconds lapsed and he had already hit the bottom, moving on to the next. Xuelin and Shew looked at each other awkwardly as their eyes



went like saucers seeing the "paranormal" before them.

Grandpa Qian on the other hand was tittering as usual. He had gotten used to the speed of Ye Chong engulfing the noodles. He was more bothered the fact that Ye Chong could be real tired for the day, considering it was the 11th bowl he dug into. That was 3 more bowls than his usual routine. His lips wriggled, wanting to tell him to get adequate rest and watch his own health. Nevertheless something struck the old man. His eyes blinked.

"Ye, don't you know how to fix a mech by yourself?" He remembered the fact that Ye Chong had a broken mech before. He was a complete layperson in this regard. He couldn't tell the difference between a pilot and a mechanic. But he just felt like asking for the poor little girls in front.

"Hm" Ye Chong chewed on.

Xuelin was shocked by Grandpa Qian's question.

"A little." Ye Chong slurped on.

A hint of disdain flashed in Xuelin's eyes.

For real? I mean even an actual student from a mechanic school wouldn't dare to claim themselves so. Any person who could fix a mech on his or her own before 25 has to be a genius.

How could this kitchen food gulping dumbo be one?

"Very well, Ye. I had known Xuelin since she was a child. So would you mind helping the girls out, as an old man's request? Please."

"Okay." He just murmured his reply. He didn't lift his head at all and he carried on munching.

Phew! That last bowl should do!

Ye Chong had finished 15 bowls of noodles in total. He did seem a little bit tired since he usually would only need about 7 to 8 bowls to feel all full.

He walked out of the shop straightaway while Xuelin hauled poor Shew off the table, all the way out. Xuelin was expecting to see this novice dumbo embarrass himself as he would be astounded by the complexity of her mech. He would be apologizing for his boastful words.

Learn about talking with brains, not with your big mouth! Hmph!

He circled the SP-II.

I had seen this model before. But that was during the NRS training.

If that was not the first opponent he encountered on the first day of his NRS training, he would have forgotten every single bit about this model of mech. The mech was a craft imprinted in his mind as he learned to fight with it the hard way. Through the fight he mastered the Non-Orderly Wavy Leap, which also happened to be the only advanced technique he knew that time.

Wait, speaking of advanced technique, Mu, that piece of junk, did not teach me any other so-called "advanced techniques" since then! I'll make sure he teaches me everything else after this...

He actually went daydreaming for a moment... Oh! He came back from his castle in the air he built afterwards. He took a careful inspection of the mech before him.

He was acutely familiar with the structure of mechs. Back at Trash Planet, Winnie had been disassembled on different occasions. He knew everything like the back of his hands. Though Winnie was quite an outdated model compared to the SP-II, both of them surprisingly did not share much difference. For the properties of SP-II, he had learned them back when he hung out at Gudista - all at his fingertips, especially when the ancient elderlies at Aurora taught him both the experience and knowledge!

Kekekekeke. Let's see what your big mouth can do.

Seeing how Ye Chong seemed to be overwhelmed by her SP-II, she snickered. She truly despised bragging, especially when the person didn't even have the quality to swagger. She anticipated the moment of truth for her to laugh wholeheartedly at the clown stumbling upon her craft.

At the same time, Shew was staring at Ye in bewilderment.

What he's doing all standing there? He really doesn't know how to fix it? Ah! Then he should not come for it! Xuelin is going to laugh her jaws off... sigh...

She showed worries in her eyes, knowing that how stubborn her Cousin Xuelin could get when the pilot field was concerned, no matter how friendly she acted normally...

That was not the case. Ye Chong skillfully lifted the cover of the engine at the mech. And he checked every part of it swiftly. Xuelin was astounded in the end instead.

His instinct told him to diagnose the condition of the engine. Back at Gudista, he had seen posts in the forum on various stories about SP-II, which had superior traveling speed but an inferior protection of the engine. Thus, the constant criticism from people.

So he checked out on the engine first.

The girls were shaking at the side, seeing how Ye Chong just jumped onto the tall SP-II without any aid or safety measure. He could just die from falling down! Xuelin's mouth enlarged. She could barely lift her jaws. Her eyes flooded with disbelief. Shew by her side was covering her mouth, trying to hold her shriek. She wouldn't want to scream. What if it made Ye Chong fall?

His intuition was accurate! The problem did lie within the engine! There was a tiny piece of something stuck in one of the major central circuits in the engine for some reason. The piece prevented the engine from working properly, which eventually led to a system failure. Well, this is simple! He simply took it out. After

some engine cleaning, he got into the cabin and ran a few tests to make sure the system had been thoroughly repaired. Yup! System's up! He jumped out of the cabin.

The SP-II was about 10 meters tall while the cabin was about 7 to 8 meters tall at the very least, and Ye Chong just jumped out of the cabin as if jumping off his bed without any form of ladders or ropes. Shew could hold it no longer, she shrieked and shrieked, covering her little mouth quivering. Xuelin was stunned by how Ye Chong got off the mech.

A perfect landing! A perfect pose! As soon as he landed he curved his legs a little to cushion the shock. He looked like a compressed spring, a frog before its leap, passive yet potent.

He got up, "All done!" As he bluntly replied and returned to the shop. He had a lot other work to do. No time to chitchat with the girls.

Xuelin remained dumbfounded. Maybe she was the dumbo after all. The shock before had yet faded in her mind. "Xuelin, what's wrong?" Shew shook her shoulders, startled by her cousin's reaction, "Aren't you going to see if it's really fixed?"

"Oh!" As if woken up from a dream, Xuelin quickly tossed a rope over and climbed into the cabin. Beep! She activated the self-diagnosis program at the processor and she was in an ambivalence hoping for the result, whether is it positive or negative. 30 seconds passed and Xuelin's head popped at the cabin entrance, in excitement she shouted, "Shewie! It's fixed! It's all fixed! Get up! Quick! We are getting home!"

She somehow hesitated a little. Nonetheless she boarded the mech afterwards. "Xuelin! Didn't you forget something? We haven't thanked the man!" She ranted right after she got herself seated.

"Hmph!" Xuelin indifferently began setting up commands, "That guy doesn't seem to care about anything! So why the appreciation?"

He acted as if I'm in debt to him or something! If you want to thank him, go alone. I'm not going!"

Shew bit her cherry lips, "Isn't that a little rude? He helped us anyway! I think... I think we should... we should..."

"Fine!" Xuelin grumbled, "We would come and thank him the next time we visit Grandpa Qian's shop! I never knew he really could fix a mech at all before!" Her fingers rubbed her gleaming chin as she pondered on.

"Oh well, it seems like the only thing we could do!" Sighed Shew.

"Okay, we are getting back home~"

"Oh no! Xuelin! There's something else we forgot! We forgot to pay! What should we do!"

"Hah! It's okay Shewie! Grandpa Qian isn't this kind of person! He wouldn't mind if we pay him the next visit!"

...

"Mu." Ye Chong summoned his partner right when he entered his room. He tumbled into the cabin, put on the Helmet, "Show me the visual of the white mech we see today!"

"Alright." Mu replied on spot.

The image of the white mech projected before him. He observed in detail. It would be better to research on the enemy, though he had no idea why he became the target in the first place.

"Anyway, Ye." The routine bitter-tongue nag commenced! "Did you know how terrible your performance was today? This is so embarrassing I cannot-ZZZzZZZzzzzzzZZzzzzzz ZZzzzzzzZZzzz"

"Mu?" Out of the blue, Mu's voice trailed off. His voice was distorted towards the end, as if something was interrupting the transmission. The visual in the Helmet was acting goofy too! "Mu!" The visual disappeared, while a bunch of snow and white noises remained. Mu's voice was utterly gone! The Helmet went pitch

black after that.

"Mu... Mu!" He removed his helmet and spoke in his mind with dismay, "Why aren't you... Mu! Speak to me Mu! Speak to me!"

# Chapter 61: Mu's Predicament

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Mu fell immediately silent, and Ye Chong panicked. Whenever something happened to Mu, Ye Chong found out that he was never of much help.

The only thing he could do now was wait. He would wait until Mu awakened again.

Could it be that the energy cells were depleted? Ye Chong quickly stood up and rushed to check Mu's energy cells. "No! That's not the problem! Mu's energy cells were still at 80%. Then what's the problem?" Ye Chong racked his brains but could not figure out the reason. His only option left was to sit quietly by Mu's side and wait.

Ye Chong sat beside Mu for the entire afternoon, but Mu was still motionless, showing no signs of awakening.

Time passed by, and without his notice, he had sat through the entire afternoon. Outside his room, Grandpa Qian called, "A guest is here!" Ye Chong looked at the time, and found that it was already evening. He gave a meaningful look at Mu before heading out - it was time to work!

Ye Chong looked dejected, and worked without much enthusiasm. Grandpa Qian had asked Ye Chong a few times if he was feeling uncomfortable, but Ye Chong only shook his head every time. Grandpa Qian's expression was one of worry.

Finally, all the customers had left. Ye Chong left after just eating two servings, and Grandpa Qian was worried about him - the boy had never eaten so little!

Ye Chong returned to his room in a depressed mood. As he closed the door behind him, Mu's voice rang, "Ye!"

Ye Chong paused and his head snapped up. His eyes filled with bottomless joy, and the edges of his mouth lifted into an arch. "Mu,

you're alright now? That's great!"

The excited Ye Chong leapt onto Mu's knees. "You scared me just now! Are you alright now?"

Mu was silent for awhile. "Based on available information, the probability of controlling the situation was from 58.5% to 61.2%!"

Ye Chong was shocked. "What happened? Mu, you seemed to have changed a lot before this." Ye Chong thought for a moment before continuing, "And now you're back to normal!"

Mu spoke lightly, "Your statement is accurate to a certain extent!"

Ye Chong was perplexed. "What's really going on, Mu?"

Mu calmly explained, "There is an unnamed program in inactive mode that has been in my information records all this time. I had repeatedly tried to activate it, as I believe it is most probably information related to my history. However, I had never found a way to activate it. The violent impact during our escape from the trash planet had activated this program, and I realized it was a Photon Simulated Intelligence program."

Upon seeing Ye Chong's confused expression, Mu continued explaining, "A Photon Simulated Intelligence program, or [PSI](#), is an autonomous decision-making program present in advanced photon processors. Different PSIs have different characteristics and temperaments, and they have a strong inclination to reject other PSIs. Fundamentally, I am also a PSI!"

"This PSI in me has a 86.9% probability of being the former controller of my photon processor. For some reason, it was forced into inactive mode, and after that, you, Ye, had activated a new PSI in the photon processor that was me."

"We are born from the same photon processor, and based on the same learning mechanism and decision making system. This also implied that we could not destroy one another, and could only compete for control of the photon processor. From the last impact,



his sudden activation placed me in a passive situation, and he managed to take control! However, based on our characteristics, I am more aggressive, and thus have a higher probability of between 8.5% to 11.2% of winning against him. This is why he was suppressed by me today. However, this probability advantage will continue to decrease! Until both have equal power!"

Mu noticed Ye Chong's confused expression and spoke his mind without care. "At your level, the probability of you understanding this complicated predicament is only 21%."

The remark was promptly ignored by Ye Chong, as he spoke in realization, "Ah, that means in your body there's two ... Um ... What's that called?" Ye Chong frowned in thought.

"PSI!" Mu provided.

"Right, PSI. But that, that PSI thing had no ill will towards me ..." Ye Chong recalled the earlier in time where he thought Mu was acting a little different, but it did not make Ye Chong feel that the mech was another Mu.

Mu agreed. "Yes. Since we are using the same information records archive, his information based decisions will be the same as mine. Hence, his attitude towards you will be no different to that of mine, but expressed with a different personality and temperament."

Ye Chong scratched his head in distress. "So complicated. As expected, anything related to photon processors is bound to be dull!" Ye Chong, who was entirely uninterested in photon processors, made his conclusion.

"I'm afraid it is to you!" Mu commented calmly.

Ye Chong sat in Mu's pilot cabin, continuing his work from earlier in the morning. As for Mu's predicament, Ye Chong knew he would be of no help, and Mu would have to handle it himself.

Ye Chong carefully inspected the white mech image pulled from

Mu's information records archive.

Pure white mechs were rare, as were pure black mechs. The elongated design and lack of any sharp edges due to its rounded designs meant that the mechs did not have the vicious quality found in common mech models. In its hand was a similarly white and odd looking gun. From the diameter of the barrel, it may even qualify as a cannon. From an average person's perspective, the mech was definitely majestic and as graceful as an aristocrat amongst the feathered species – the white swan.

However, Ye Chong obviously did not feel the same. Ye Chong only felt an extreme sense of danger.

The white mech may seem as graceful as an aristocrat, but Ye Chong would not underestimate its potential as a threat. Ye Chong was sure that the odd looking gun in his hand must have some underlying power, and was not just some plaything. Ye Chong also noticed with his sharp observation that the mech had at least thirty two concealed weapons cache (yin shi she ji chang), and that was quite astonishing to Ye Chong.

"This – this is surely too much. Is there a need to have so many of them? Besides, can the pilot in the mech control them all? The energy consumption must also be huge! Is he thinking of shooting all of them in one go and end the battle?"

No matter how he saw it, Ye Chong did not believe that this was a common advanced level mech. Ye Chong definitely thought that the mech was even more technologically advanced than his F-58. No matter how well the F-58 performed, it was still a training mech, and its weapons were far outstripped by the opponent's.

"Why would he want to kill me?" Ye Chong could not figure it out!

Only the Reno Society had qualms with him, but would Reno Society own a mech like this? Ye Chong was a little wary of that fact. Besides, Reno Society definitely knew nothing of his

whereabouts. Then who could it be? Black Cove? If Black Cove had ill designs for him, then it would be a plausible scenario. However, the mech was obviously a contrast to Black Cove's usual style. The difference was too striking, and thus, it was probably not Black Cove!

Then who would it be? Ye Chong agonisingly searched his memories!

"The opponent had crash landed into me while I was flying with the F-58. The opponent probably did not know my identity, and could only recognize the mech! Could it be that the F-58 made me an enemy? But wait! The F-58 was a Black Cove training mech, which meant that the opponent must know about the F-57, and understand that it was a Black Cove training mech. Sodoes this mean that the opponent thought I am a Black Cove citizen and therefore, treated me as an enemy? Hmm, then it seemed highly likely that the opponent is an enemy of Black Cove!"

As he considered this idea, Ye Chong began to believe that it made sense! He must be an enemy of Black Cove! He must have mistook him as someone from Black Cove! This seemed to be the only reasonable explanation!

By then, Mu's voice rang out, "Based on currently available information and my calculations, the probability that the opponent is an enemy of Black Cove is about 71%. The uncertainty is due to insufficient information and therefore not calculable!"

As expected, Mu's calculations arrived at the same conclusion as he did!

Hmm, if that was the case, then what should he do?

Translator's note: Pronounced as "psy" in "psychology".

# Chapter 62: Ye Chong Went Outdoors

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Ye Chong was troubled.

He had been training on his speed lately, and did not spend any time on strength training. Now, he had reached another bottleneck in his speed. Since speed was achieved through strength, without support from the appropriate amount of strength, his speed could only stay at its current level.

However, this was not the trash planet, where metallic trash was abundant and everywhere, as it was easy to find a piece of metal of suitable size there. Ye Chong had trained his strength with the most basic and simple method - using weights. He did weight lifting and used weights in exercises such as running and squatting. However, he was considerably stronger now, such that if he continued with the same training method, he would need much heavier weights to fulfil his needs. Otherwise, it would be difficult to achieve the desired results.

Except for a few rare materials, none were dense enough to meet Ye Chong's requirements. However, one thing he could be certain of was that the materials that were dense enough were not obtainable at the present moment. Without a high enough density, the weight would be too much, besides being inconvenient. It would then be impossible to carry out training at Grandpa Qian's house!

Mu was interested in the dilemma with Ye Chong's muscular development. "Ye, your muscles are still not significantly developing!"

Ye Chong was not too concerned. "Didn't you say it's alright like this?"

Mu evenly replied, "It is alright, I'm just curious about your state of development!"

Ye Chong shook his head. "I don't know the reason for it too. I've always been like this since young, never very muscular. Based on what you said, I should be much more muscular by now!"

Mu agreed. "By right, you should not be having this body form. However, I cannot inspect your body without proper measuring equipment."

Ye Chong did not mind about it. "At least it isn't a bad thing!"

Mu bluntly replied, "Information is insufficient to calculate that!"

Ye Chong suddenly thought of something. "Mu, my basic pilot training is almost complete. When are you teaching any advanced techniques? I can only perform one now – the Non-orderly Wavy Leap!"

Mu said, "Advanced techniques are based on fundamental movements executed with unique battle strategies in mind –"

Ye Chong cut him off. "Just tell me if you're teaching or not!"

Mu responded, "Only if you insist on it! However, do you have a spare mech?"

Ye Chong thought about it, and felt discouraged. "Ah, I only have the F-58. That white mech seems to have a grudge against Black Cove. If we meet again by accident, it will be disastrous! If it was not for the good terrain last time, it would probably be a lot riskier!"

Mu said, "It seems that the probability of you performing any pilot training is zero!" Ye Chong felt that Mu was definitely taking pleasure in his misfortune.

Ye Chong suddenly brightened up. "How about if I go for the NR Training Center?"

Mu disagreed. "The NR Training Center is incapable of granting you further improvement! What you lack now is experience in actual combat. However realistic the virtual net may feel like, it is

incomparable to engaging in reality!"

Ye Chong groaned. "Actual combat? There's nothing I can do about that!"

Without his training routine, Ye Chong felt idle most of the time. Mu suggested that he go out more often, since Ye Chong was still far from fully integrating into society, and many of his thoughts were still too different from the average person's!

Grandpa Qian agreed with the idea that Ye Chong should explore the outside world more, commenting that he looked the very opposite of lively, and should leave the house for a while every day. He even generously offered Ye Chong some zuan credits as allowance!

Thus, Ye Chong went out to the streets under the support of both Mu and Grandpa Qian.

Unlike last time, where Ye Chong had the very definitive aim of obtaining his identity card when he went outside, this time it was purely for leisure. Ye Chong stood outside the main door, unable to decide where to head to first. Should he turn left? Or right? Or just walk straight ahead?

The observant Grandpa Qian noticed Sun Xuelin and Xiu some distance ahead, and greeted them loudly, "Xuelin!"

Sun Xuelin looked towards the direction of the voice, saw Grandpa Qian, and immediately grabbed Xiu along to meet the old man. "Good day, Grandpa Qian!" Xiu also greeted demurely, "Good day, Grandpa Qian!" Grandpa Qian laughed in delight, "Hehe, today Xiu took the initiative to greet me first, what a rare occasion!" Xiu immediately blushed in a cherry shade.

Grandpa Qian asked the two, "Are you going out for a walk?"

Sun Xuelin replied, "Yes, would grandpa like us to get you anything?"

Grandpa Qian smiled. "Oh no, but Ye has since only arrived at

Blue Ocean for a short while, and he's still unfamiliar with the place. If you're heading out for a walk, can you bring Ye with you? Besides, you're of the same age, he should be good company!" Grandpa Qian dragged the awkwardly standing Ye Chong over to the girls.

Sun Xuelin answered readily, "Sure! No problem, leave it to us!" She had been extremely curious about Ye all this while. Now that the opportunity presented itself, there was no reason for her to reject it.

On the other hand, Xiu watched curiously at Ye Chong from behind Xuelin.

Ye Chong still wore a plain expression.

Grandpa Qian was overjoyed. "That's great! Then I leave it to you! Ye, you go along with them and have fun!"

Ye Chong acknowledged with an "Okay," since he had no idea where to go himself. Having a guide familiar with the area was not a bad idea, since he would then also be able to observe how normal people live their lives!

The trio walked along side by side.

Ye Chong watched the occasional mechs flying over him, filled with envy. It was a pity that he had a mech but was unable to use it. The fact soured his mood.

Ye Chong did not take the initiative to speak, and Sun Xuelin, feeling that the situation was getting awkward, spoke up to ease the tension. "Ye, is your real name also Ye?"

Ye Chong formed a short and firm reply, "Ye Chong!" No words came from him after that.

Since Ye Chong kept silent, Sun Xuelin continued, "I'm called Sun Xuelin, this here is Xiu!" Sun Xuelin braced through the introductions.

"Mm, I know!" Ye Chong replied.

Just as Sun Xuelin was beginning to run out of ideas, the usually timid Xiu made her move. "Ye, where are you from?"

"Er," Ye Chong almost continued with "trash planet", but stopped himself just in time and quickly asked Mu in his mind, "Mu, where am I from?"

Mu replied, "Your identity card indicates that your origin planet is Richie."

Being superficial, Ye Chong replied calmly, "Richie!"

"Richie?" The two girls shook their heads at that, since they had never heard of it. There were countless planets in the galaxy, and a vast number of planets in the five main galaxies were inhabited. Unless one was a specialised researcher in planetary geography, the average person would not know the names of many inhabited planets.

What Sun Xuelin would like to know the most was the condition of Ye Chong's mech. However, she was unsure of how to approach the subject. She had initially planned to get familiar with him by chatting before asking him about it, but she did expect Ye Chong to be a man of few words.

Of course, she was not aware that if she had asked Ye Chong in a direct manner, the man would have probably answered her straight.

"I can't believe this guy is so simple-minded!" Sun Xuelin thought with outrage.

In reality, no one could not blame Ye Chong for this. Ye Chong would only show his more casual side to Mu. He could not do so Grandpa Qian, much less someone he was unfamiliar with like Sun Xuelin and Xiu!

Ye Chong observed the people on the streets. They all seemed very calm, lacking the vigilance and hostility that wild animals



show against an unfamiliar entity entering their territory. They also do not seem aggressive. "Hmm, it seems that the living principles of the mutants on the trash planet are not suited here after all. I'll have to be more wary in future" Ye Chong thought.

Suddenly, the three noticed a huge commotion up ahead!

## Chapter 63: An Unexpected Reunion

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Sun Xuelin pulled Xiu along and rushed towards the commotion.

Ye Chong frowned, as he was not fond of situations like this. It was too noisy, and the crowd was too dense, such that his area of movement was more restricted. It would also be more difficult for him to have a good grasp of the situation around him.

Ye Chong knitted his brows, but still followed the two into the crowd.

In the center of the commotion, an old man was knocked onto the ground, his belongings scattered about. A middle-aged man was hurling angry words at the old man, "You old geezer, are you blind? This suit of mine costsgold zuan! Can you pay for it if you had damaged it? Look, it's all wrinkled now, it'll cost a few hundred zuan to fix it!" The man gave a look of disdain at the elderly. "Look at your pitifully poor self, I guess you can't really pay for it. Hmph, I'll count myself unlucky today. What a blind old fool!" The man was all stuck-up and arrogant.

Sun Xuelin was the first to respond, as she pointed furiously at the middle-aged man and retaliated, "You've gone too far, how can you spew those useless words when you've knocked down an old man? That's enough, if you speak again I'll teach you a real lesson! Hmph!" Sun Xuelin rolled up her sleeves, ready to act true to her words.

Xiu went to the old man and helped him up with some difficulty. She carefully brushed off dust from the old man's body and asked softly, "Grandpa, are you alright?" The elderly was grateful for her help. "I'm alright, little miss, thank you!" Xiu returned a mellow smile.

"You little b\*tch, how dare you speak to me like that, didn't your elders teach you some basic manners? Hmph, I can tell that you're just as despicable! Hmph, let me tell you -"

Sun Xuelin was absolutely ballistic, her fists wrapped tighter and tighter. Xiu quickly went to placate her before she went berserk. If a fight took place, they would not be in a good position in the face of the law.

The middle-aged man was pleased to see Sun Xuelin holding herself back. "Hehe... Little miss, let me tell you -"

Their confrontation was not noticed by Ye Chong, as he was completely distracted by a tiny holographic case on the ground.

Perhaps the term "case" would confuse one of its actual size, since the case was only five millimeters square in area, small and compact. On its light purple surface was a pattern of two lines spiralling around each other like a corkscrew, and its two sides were slightly depressed inwards. A pinhole was located at the front side, which projected multicoloured light rays that formed a semi-transparent person. The projection was very realistic, and looked like a miniature version of the old man. Holographic cases were usually used to record certain events and were more expensive than memory chips. They were also commonly used for commemorative purposes.

However, what caught Ye Chong's attention was not the case itself, but the report that was currently being made by the miniature old man.

"Regarding the photon processor's design, I had combined Fairfax's annuli and short pulse photon circuits. About this idea, I should mention that I've met a young friend on the virtual net who suggested this combination, and thus inspired me to ..." This was obviously a report during an academic conference.

Wasn't the combination of Fairfax's annuli and short pulse photon circuits a method that Grandpa Xu specialised in? He had even meticulously explained the idea to Ye Chong before. Could this be Grandpa Xu? Ye Chong could not help but scrutinise the old man before him, and find that the old man looked a little similar to

Grandpa Xu.

Ye Chong came forward and tested his idea, "Grandpa Xu?"

The old man froze. "You are?" Old Xu looked at the young man before him. Usually, those who knew him called him Old Xu or Professor Xu, while only those who were his relatives or younger family members of his friends called him Grandpa Xu. However, the person before him was a stranger. Could he be a grandson of one of his friends?

Ye Chong knew from his expression that his guess was not wrong. He continued excitedly, "Grandpa Xu, it's me, Little Y, YC, do you remember me? That Little Y from Aurora!"

"YC! He's YC!" Sun Xuelin was bursting with anger and nearly went berserk earlier, but she quieted down upon hearing Ye Chong's revelation. Xiu covered her mouth with both hands, her eyes filled with disbelief. The two girls were stupefied, and exchanged a glance of obvious joy. Ye Chong was completely absorbed in meeting Grandpa Xu that he missed their odd reaction. However, even if he did not, he would not have thought it was related to him.

Grandpa Xu was also astonished, and grabbed Ye Chong's hands tightly with emotion. "Little Y? You're Little Y? That's wonderful! That's wonderful!" Grandpa Xu was overwhelmed, such that he got a little repetitive in his words. Ye Chong gave a bashful smile! Grandpa Xu immediately recognised that smile and became more assured of his identity!

Sun Xuelin and Xiu, on the other hand, looked as though they had seen a ghost - they did not think it was possible to see an expression like that on Ye Chong's face. Their faces now were undoubtedly more expressive than Ye Chong's.

The middle-aged man noticed that Ye Chong seemed to be familiar with the old man, and an idea came to his mind. He shamelessly pronounced, "Ha, you old geezer, you messed up my

top-of-the-line outfit that's worth five golden zuan, better pay up now!"

Ye Chong purposely ignored the middle-aged man and gripped Grandpa Xu's arms to support him. "Grandpa Xu, let's go!" Grandpa Xu nodded. "Mm, let's go!" Sun Xuelin and Xiu supported the old man from the other side.

The middle-aged man grew anxious as they were about to leave, and made a grab for Ye Chong. "No can do, you can't just walk away like that, you gotta pay me back first. Let me tell you, I'm a man of status ..."

Before the middle-aged man could get to Ye Chong, Ye Chong made his move!

With a slight move, Ye Chong clasped onto the man's throat. As he was about to move in for the kill, Mu anxiously reminded him, "Don't! Ye!"

Ye Chong paused. Fortunately, Ye Chong now had better control over his strength, or the man would have definitely lost his life.

Ye Chong was confused. "Mu, what is it?"

Mu replied, "Based on my information, killing on the streets would violate the local law, and you'll be heavily pursued!"

"Oh, law? What's that?"

"Rules that humans create for their society!"

"Oh, but has that got to do with me? I still don't really get it!"

"It's complicated, but this is obviously not a good time to discuss it!"

"Alright, we'll talk about it later, but what do I do now?"

"Based on my information, threatening is not a bad option! Based on theories in social psychology, your opponent is obviously shocked. With an appropriate level of threatening, the probability of ending this altercation will be over 92%."

"Threatening it is! I'll try it out!"

The crowd noticed a flash of movement before Ye Chong's right hand was clasped tightly on the middle-aged man's throat. The man felt the pressure and struggled desperately with his mouth gasping for air. The spectators also gasped in astonishment.

Ye Chong quietly whispered into the man's ear, "If you don't let this go, I'll kill you!" His tone was light, as if he was only saying something mundane.

The middle-aged man clawed at his throat and coughed incessantly. He was obviously in pain, unable to utter a single word, and his eyes glowed with terror. Ye Chong's words were like a chilling breeze in winter, and he felt like a naked man in the wind, shivering despite being clothed.

Suddenly, there was a commotion amongst the spectating crowd, and someone shouted, "The police are here!" "Thank goodness, the police are finally here!"

## Chapter 64: Ji Shangyan

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His reunion with Grandpa Xu was a joyful matter, but Ye Chong did not expect the reunion to be under such circumstances. The police officer who came to the scene was Fei, who came to find Ye Chong at Grandpa Qian's house earlier. Fei noticed the finger marks on the middle-aged man's throat and immediately came up with some excuse to get the man out of the area. "Just get this settled fast, who knows when the guy would go crazy? That'll be my field day!" thought the Inspector sarcastically.

Grandpa Xu was more uptight with Sun Xuelin and Xiu, but far more casual with Ye Chong. They occasionally discussed academic problems, and this reminded Ye Chong of his days at Aurora.

However, once he was outdoors, Ye Chong resumed his dull composure.

Blue Ocean was an economically and technologically advanced planet with a population of six hundred million. Its society championed openness and freedom, and the planet offered abundant natural resources. These were the reasons the planet was coveted as an ideal home by its many inhabitants.

Jesha, where Ye Chong stayed, was one of the three largest zones on Blue Ocean, and also the most prosperous of the three.

It was already late when Ye Chong returned to Grandpa Qian's house. After finishing his work, Ye Chong returned to his room. He believed in the need to understand more about the society he lived in, as there were many things here that contradicted his principles. The sooner he could understand this society, the better and easier he could live within it. Without a doubt, Mu was his only teacher for the task.

Ye Chong began by asking, "Mu, let's continue our topic this morning! What do you mean by law?"

Mu replied, "Based on my information, it will be easier for you to understand the law as rules set by the strongest members of society!"

"The strongest members? Stronger than me?"

Mu kept his tone light, but condescension was positively radiating from his choice of words. "Based on my information, the gap between your strengths is almost as wide as the universe itself!"

Ye Chong changed his tack. "If I had killed that man today, what would happen to me?"

Mu replied, "Based on the Blue Ocean Penal Code, Article 11, a convicted murderer would face up to forty years of prison life, and if the act of murder was atrocious, the murderer could be sentenced to death!"

Ye Chong frowned. "Who're the law executors?"

"Based on Blue Ocean safety measures, all police officers, military officers and safety department personnel have the right to pursue and capture violators of the law, while all members of the public are obligated to assist in the capture!"

Fortunately, Ye Chong knew his own strength, and was not arrogant enough to believe that he was the best amongst the rest. With so many against him, it would not take the strongest to defeat him, as even the average person could take him down. Ye Chong was beginning to understand the risks behind acts of violence! However, he was also quick to notice a problem. "What is I did it discreetly?"

Mu replied, "Based on my information, if they do not discover evidence for your act of murder, you will not be sentenced for any punishment."

"Evidence?"

"Objects, witnesses or other things that can prove your crime!"



"So, if I am careful enough, and they could not obtain any evidence, does that mean I'll be beyond the law?"

"You're right up to a certain level, but I must remind you, they have quite a few practical and brilliant methods up their sleeves. The probability of them discovering your activities cannot be ignored."

"Oh, so it's actually a matter of a battle of strength?"

"You're right up to a certain level ..."

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Ji Shangyan was happily humming a little tune, as he deftly maneuvered his jaw-droppingly expensive mech. "Ji Shangyan" may sounds like a feminine name, but he was undeniably male. However, his gender-neutral appearance was often mistaken for a female's. His silvery white hair framed a pair of enchanting blue eyes, and his gentle smile had bewitched a great many fair maidens.

Ji Shangyan's mech was painted mostly in alternating blues and greys, with a few important components emphasized in gold. The hull was streamlined, with a dimmed shade of blue that gave it a demure quality, and a silver hue that made the mech look sturdier. The slightly protruding chest of the mech was a sign of reinforced armor, emanating a steady and calm presence.

Ji Shangyan's mech piloting skills were applaudable, as was demonstrated by his nimble traversal amongst the buildings in Jasha.

If he succeeded in his visit to Old Xu this time, he would have rendered great service. However, it seemed that Old Xu was difficult to approach! What should he do? Ji Shangyan rubbed between his eyebrows in vexation, as he still did not have a workable plan. His eldest brother was rejected last time, and passed the task to him. No matter what, he must find a way to

convince Old Xu. If one trip was not enough, he would visit again and again.

Old Xu was alone at home. Since his partner's passing, and with the lack of any children, he was now all alone. The emptiness in his house and his life did not leave him unaffected. His engagement in research had helped, but he did not expect to achieve a breakthrough in his field in later years and gain prominence. However, he was getting old and weathered nowadays!

His photon processor signalled the arrival of a guest. Through the processor's holographic images, Elder Xu saw an unfamiliar and charming young man. This was not someone he recognized, and Elder Xu grew suspicious!

Through the visitor's intercom, Elder Xu asked, "Who're you looking for?" A device right outside the main door of his house projected his image before the entrance.

Ji Shangyan observed the image and decided, based on his intel, that it must be the target of his visit, Elder Xu. Ji Shangyan replied respectfully, "You must be Professor Xu. I'm Ji Shangyan, and I've been to a few of your talks. I was wondering if I could have your advice on a few matters regarding mechs!"

"Oh," Elder Xu hesitated in thought. Visitors with academic intentions were common, but they were mostly past their forties. This was the first time Elder Xu encountered someone as young as him.

"Ji Shangyan?" Elder Xu seemed to realize something. "Your surname is Ji?"

Ji Shangyan felt his heart skipped a beat, and knew that things were turning sour, but he still braced himself and replied affirmatively. "Yes!"

"You're a member of the Ji Family?" Elder Xu's expression

twisted.

Ji Shangyan cursed on the inside, and kept silent.

Elder Xu continued indifferently, "The Ji family, enough with your demands, there's no need to waste any more time on this, I will never cooperate with you. Just give up now!" Elder Xu ignored Ji Shangyan and terminated communication. His projection vanished before Ji Shangyan's eyes.

It seemed that his eldest brother had really offended Elder Xu last time. However, what troubled Ji Shangyan the most was that the older man had his loathing against his brother extended towards the entire Ji family. This made his task of convincing Elder Xu to work with the Ji family that much more difficult!

After a moment's thought, Ji Shangyan produced his comm device and spoke to the person on the receiving end, "You all better keep Old Xu under tight surveillance. I want his daily activities and whereabouts, and a list of the people he gets in touch with. And get their identities and addresses, understand? Do not slack! I want all the details, remember, all of it!" Ji Shangyan was out of ideas, and could only resort to surveillance for the moment.

After disconnecting his comm device, Ji Shangyan continued his miserable pondering - what can he do to convince Elder Xu?

# Chapter 65: Ye Chong's Philosophy

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Nowadays, whenever Ye Chong was on the virtual net, he did not just frequent Aurora in Gutista and the NR Training Center. Instead, he began to explore further. He had decided to completely understand the strange world around him. Ye Chong understood that survival in some locations are dependent on one's understanding of the area. The more one understood, the easier life would become.

His daily conversations with Mu increased his understanding of things. Recently, he spent more time outdoors, since he grew fond of observing passersbys on the streets. While they were not Ye Chong's prey, he still treated them as though they were prey - he examined them through a hunter's eye, carefully examining the people around him, observing their actions, habits, behaviors, physical conditions and so on.

As Ye Chong continued his observation, his understanding of his surroundings began to deepen.

While he had planned to visit Grandpa Xu today, his job mattered more. Ye Chong understood that Grandpa Xian's little business could not support his stay, but there is more to living than making money. Is that not so? Grandpa Xian made him feel at home, and this was not something any amount of gold zuan could buy for him. While Ye Chong did not think of himself as highly intelligent, this was something he could still understand.

Ye Chong kneaded the dough with vigour, as the flour mixture twisted and folded under his strength. Ye Chong had improved his skill, thanks to the increasingly refined control of his strength. The noodles he made had a distinct taste, and were definitely one of a kind.

Now, if only he could have one more mech - even a Raven would do - and life would be perfect!

Sun Xuelin and Xiu came to see him.

The two waited patiently until he was done with his work before coming up to him. Sun Xuelin grabbed Xiu along, and began with a tiny voice, "Ye ..."

Ye Chong gave the two an expressionless look. "What is it?"

Sun Xuelin flustered at his apathy, and continued mumbling, "Ye ... Ye ..."

Ye Chong continued staring at them. Xiu did not even dare to raise her head. Sun Xuelin grew more nervous. "Ye ... We ... We'd like to ask for your help!"

"Help?" Ye Chong frowned.

His words unexpectedly calmed Sun Xuelin. "Do you know how to modify mechs?"

"A bit!" Ye Chong replied.

Sun Xuelin continued, "Mm, we'd like to ask for your help. Our school is having the [MP Games](#) next week, and there's a section where a mech modification technician is needed. I'd like to ask for your help!"

"Ask for my help?" Ye Chong looked at the duo.

Oddly, against Ye Chong's flat stare, Sun Xuelin grew anxious again. "Yes, we'd like to ask for your help!"

Ye Chong gave it a thought before answering, "Oh, sure, but I charge 1,250 zuan per hour!"

Sun Xuelin was stupefied, but quickly turned furious. "You, you ... Are you charging for helping out? You, you ... I didn't think you were someone like this! Hmph, I guess we're wrong about you!" She spoke in pure disdain. Xiu also lifted her gaze towards Ye Chong in astonishment, obviously surprised by his reaction.

Against the duo's expressions, Ye Chong frowned a little. "What did I do wrong this time?" Ye Chong had actually offered to charge

at half the market rate, since he did not actually have a modification technician's license.

Ye Chong asked in his mind, "Mu, I thought a fair deal was one of the most basic rules?"

Mu replied, "Based on my information, you're absolutely right. However, most people believe that charging a friend when helping them is disgraceful!"

Ye Chong was confused. "Are they my friends?"

Mu had no intention of helping him on this one. "That is for you to decide!"

Ye Chong decisively announced, "Of course not!" Friends? What a joke, we're not even that familiar with them. No matter how I see it, they were not friends! And if they were not friends, then charging for my service was reasonable. What's so strange about that?

Since he did not commit any mistakes, Ye Chong had no intention of further discussion. He gave the two a flat look and declared, "You're welcome to leave!" before turning his back to them.

Sun Xuelin paled in anger, and dragged Xiu along and left.

The conflict did not affect Ye Chong in the slightest. After greeting Grandpa Qian, he began his leisurely stroll to the streets. Ye Chong was not as dazed as he was before on the streets. Instead, he now felt comfortable; people-watching had become a great hobby of his, one that he found to be quite interesting.

Grandpa Xu's place was some distance away from Grandpa Qian's little shop. If he kept at his speed, the trip would take too long. Ye Chong decidedly picked up his pace and began running. He did not run too fast, for he was no longer as ignorant as before to understand that his speed was simply too incredible when compared to the average person! The first engulfer to attract

attention gets the death sentence - this was a truth that Ye Chong understood. "Ah, if I have a mech to use I wouldn't need to walk!" Ye Chong felt dispirited as he recalled the white mech. It was a pity that he only had a training mech. If he had a Black Cove war mech, Ye Chong was certain that he could definitely finish off his opponent!

If Mu agreed to help him, Ye Chong believed that the white mech would not stand a chance. However, Mu had been insistent in his refusal, and Ye Chong felt odd about his reaction!

Ye Chong leisurely ran on the streets, his breathing rhythmic and entirely unaffected. This level of exertion was nothing to Ye Chong. His strange physique was something that puzzled even Mu, but Ye Chong did not feel that he was in any way abnormal. The way he saw it, since it was something beneficial, it did not matter if he did not understand why!

Grandpa Xu's house was getting nearer, just around the corner. The last time Elder Xu hyperlinked to the virtual net, he had spread the news of YC's whereabouts on Blue Ocean to his other old companions. They were at once jealous and envious of Elder Xu, and a few of them even proclaimed to visit Blue Ocean one day to see Ye Chong. As for the few who were already residing on Blue Ocean, but in other zones, they had offered their addresses to Ye Chong and invited him to visit anytime.

Ye Chong felt comfortable with the academic atmosphere during his discussion with Grandpa Xu, and he relished it. The thought of meeting with Grandpa Xu soon made him a little excited.

Mu suddenly spoke up to Ye Chong when he was heading straight towards Grandpa Xu's house. "Ye, careful, stay away! There are four mechs monitoring the area! There's also another person, probably the commander."

Ye Chong felt a chill down his spine, and asked frantically, "Where?" Ye Chong did not change his pace, and walked pass

Grandpa Xu's house like any other passerby, never slowing down.

Mu replied, "There's one at the top of the highrise on the opposite side of the road, and another two at 120 degrees from the first one. There's also someone in the highrise directly opposite of Grandpa Xu's house, on the twenty first floor. This one's probably the commander!" "The commander, I must get rid of him first, and do so without alerting the rest, or risk complications!" Ye Chong assessed the situation.

Ye Chong thought with contempt, "Hmph, are these people looking for trouble with Grandpa Xu? Probably so! Hmm, no matter how you look at it, they're definitely here with ill intentions! And if they're here with ill intentions, then ..."

Ye Chong continued running leisurely, calmly, with all signs of normalcy.

When he reached the tall building directly opposite Grandpa Xu's house, Ye Chong came to a stop and entered the building.

Ye Chong found a self-service inquiry photon processor in the corner of the main reception, pretending to look up some information. Two seconds later, Mu had already hacked into the photon processor.

The original image on the screen suddenly vanished, replaced by the building's complete structural schematics. The surveillance commander was on the twenty first floor, Room 065. Mu had also indicated the locations of all the surveillance devices. The building's surveillance system was fairly complete, with a large coverage area and very few blind spots. To enter the building discretely would not be an easy task.

Ye Chong clearly remembered the idea of evidence as Mu once described. He asked, "Mu, if I'm recorded in the system, can you wipe them out?"

"Based on available information, the success rate is above 97



percent!" Mu sounded exceedingly confident.

Ye Chong considered the situation. "Then if I can wipe out all my records before they notice, does it mean that they won't figure out who did it?"

Mu replied after a moment, "Based on my calculations, there's a 79 percent probability that they would not notice you, but there is still another 21 percent probability of finding you out through other means."

After some pondering, Ye Chong decided, "If that's the case, then we'll make the first move. We'll not wait for them to come to us, but get to them first!" Ye Chong had no concept of striking after an opponent's move; since he had confirmed the opponent's hostility, he would not hesitate to act. His words were filled with confidence and dominance - Ye Chong was like a wild beast ready to put on a fight!

Mu had no objections to his plan!

After deciding on the course of action, Ye Chong began his move.

He moved quickly to the twenty first floor, and came before the door of Room 065. The door was well secured, and while Ye Chong was confident he could break through this particular type of alloy metal, the act would alert the room's inhabitant. With the enemy alerted, his position would be compromised, and Ye Chong doubted he could best four mechs surrounding him at once. He must eliminate the person in the room first, in order to greatly reduce the probability of him being surrounded and attacked.

The problem was, how could he eliminate this person without alerting the other four?

MP Games: Mech Pilots' Games is an event like sports day, but for mech pilots

## Chapter 66: I Love Assassination

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Slender had his eyes fixed on the security camera. His sight wafted through the hologram in the monitor, of an image projecting the accommodation of that old man Xu. He observed meticulously. He was trying his very best to discern the appearance of every passerby near Xu's place, especially those who happened to be in that old man's proximity, just to identify if they were knitted together. He was devoted and held initiatives towards his job. He knew that the authority assigned him to this job instead of others because of such good nature he had.

I'll find those nasty rats out, by then, I'll—

A hand covered his mouth out of the blue. Stiffness had skimmed down his neck before he could react. Splashes of blood gushed out from him. Are those my old blood? No... No way... Slender was horrified as he struggled, wriggling helplessly through the cold hand gripping him like a wrench. I can't die! I can't die just yet! He bawled in his mind but he was already losing control of his body by that moment.

The stiffness strangling his neck remained like a freezing breeze, slowly consuming his stamina as he bled profusely. Oozes of pain blinded him, as he went unconscious and finally stopped moving soon after.

Not till he was utterly dead Ye Chong would be letting the man go.

He tossed Slender to the ground.

He turned away and was going to run, yet... That door is such a nuisance. It was a problem for Ye Chong because it was made out of metal and he could not simply break a metallic door without alarming anyone in the building. Fortunately, the white wall before him prompted some ideas. It was a wall of thermoplastic composite, having a thickness about 10 centimeters and an

effective noise absorber. It is only thicker than the heavy metallic door by 2 to 3 centimeters but way better. Who doesn't like walls with noise absorption property? Especially strong ones like this. It comes in handy.

Firstly, he went downstairs to the lobby and had set security cameras in all 21 floors of the building to sleep mode. Of course, such a tech-savvy task would be of Mu's responsibility. He then returned to Room 065 at the highest floor.

The dagger which Gu Shaoze gave Ye Chong as a gift had never left his body since then.

He pulled out the dagger and measured the thickness in comparison to the wall. Thup! A stab into the wall. He had to admit that the noise-absorbing ability of the thermoplastic composite wall was outstanding. Not even the slightest sound was heard when he launched that dagger of his. It was rather sturdy too considering that Ye Chong took quite a lot of effort to fully insert the dagger.

The highest floor was completely off-limits it seemed, probably a special request from the dead man, judging by how there was literally nobody else in the walkway. Fantastic! That was an additional advantage for Ye Chong's escape.

Ugh! Ugh...

He was slicing through the wall laboriously as he would never want to alert anyone nearby with the screeches he could possibly make if he went too fast. He maintained his speed cautiously. He could feel the hardness of the wall gradually wearing off the strength of his hand. Oh the amount of friction on his palm! It was tough. Throughout the process, the swishes made by his dagger could be faintly heard. Ye Chong was very confident that if he were to stay farther from the wall, he would hear nothing.

I swear I would never use thermoplastic composite for my walls when I build my house in future; I would be killed in my sleep

before I even wake up with such security it offers.

The pressure on the dagger had lifted. Yes! Ye Chong was excited. All he needed was a gentle push to the piece he cut off to the front. Wait! Wait! Wait! He ran to catch the falling piece before it landed with a loud thump. The person in the room before him was still facing his back to Ye Chong. It seemed like he did not alert anyone in there. Phew! He sighed.

Okay, now to the second task in the list...

He walked by the fainted man. His eyes were more interested in the monitor on the table than some dead man lying on the floor. He fiddled with the settings on the monitor, trying to get something.

There was no time for him to look through the directory. Time was precious. He pressed a few buttons and ejected the microchip. He slid the chip into his pocket and began frisking the slender guy on the floor. A few belongings he believed to contain the man's identity were stolen.

Ye Chong rushed downstairs and hit the lobby again. This time he deleted all his involvement off the record at the self-service processor as soon as he arrived.

He exited the building and warped F-58 out from the alternate dimension.

He observed the lawn outside the foundation as he plotted another round of trespassing. The Hawkeye, a model of mech specialized for reconnaissance, had a diminutive body compared to other models, of a mere length about 6 meters, coated with a unique kind of painting, which changed its color according to surroundings, allowing effective camouflage. The killer feature of the Hawkeye was the pair of "antennas" on its head stranding to the back, which tremendously boosts its scope of scanning and capacity of impulse-receiving. It also came with an extremely powerful scanning and anti-detection system. High mobility, great

speed and overwhelming length of battery life offered by its exclusive battery, though in return it had to sacrifice its durability. To fit in the battery, the armor had to be much thinner. With such lackluster thickness, one hit would finish the machine off. There was not much of possibility for it to fight back too, considering its weak firepower.

Wow this dude actually uses a reconnaissance model to watch his place. What a pimp!

Mumbled Ye Chong.

F-58 lurked like a jaguar on its hunt as it coveted its prey in darkness. It was undeniable that the F-58 got the upper hand in this situation. A mere training mech model it might be, it still had a more superior anti-detection system. The alarm did not go off as it moved. They were undetected the whole time.

Ye Chong raised a spear. Well, a magnetic sword that sets off frequency would be bad for a sneak-attack. Imagine if he were to brandish that cool sword towards one of the machines that fell prey to his assassination, due to the reflective nature of mech armors, the frequency would be easily bounced everywhere and all mechs and aircrafts in the vicinity would immediately detect Ye Chong committing a crime there. In the next moment, before he knew it, he would be bombarded by 3 other mechs. Another session of fast and furious awaited.

He never desired an overkill with a Hawkeye, which was blatantly a weakling in front of the mighty F-58. Its inability to even detect F-58 with its so-called "advanced" scanning system had already justified everything, even a layman could tell which mech would win in the first 10 seconds. So what Ye Chong pondered about was a way to knock the Hawkeye out without being detected and giving them a chance to notify the others.

Assassination. Oh assassination, one true hobby Ye Chong adored. The passion increased the likelihood of success in the

operation this time. He would get it over with by hook or by crook, as long as it would add up to the success rate of his operation.

The left hand of F-58 snapped the neck of the Hawkeye while the spear in its right pierced the cabin. It was a spear with a diameter beyond 30 centimeters. Any man could be dead even by minimal contact. That pathetic armor of Hawkeye could barely hold up Ye Chong's spear as it shredded like paper upon the stab. That doesn't nail it. Ye Chong was not ending yet. He tore away the shattered armor at the cabin and he saw the murdered man inside. He felt much relieved as he stealthy placed the mech at a corner of the rooftop.

Ye Chong would break his neck to assassinate. No pun intended. But it was not his, rather the other man's. And he loved it. He loved the moment when the neck snapped in his bare hand in a nice crack. It was such a strange sensation. One move and that is all it took. Nothing else would be needed. People would be dead without doing anything funny. No sound, no drama, no struggle. Straightforward, hassle-free.

Okay that's the second Hawkeye snapped. Now to the last two mechs at the corners.

It was also a Hawkeye at one corner. Ye Chong was shocked. Wow! Did he literally set off 3 mechs specially for reconnaissance on an old man like Grandpa Xu? Most people would assume Hawkeye as another random scouting machinery but that was not the point! Ye Chong knew it deeply, it would certainly cost an arm and a leg for a specialized mech like Hawkeye, just like how the Sand Scorpio he once used was much more expensive than the Gold Wheat despite its less-pleasant look compared to the Gold Wheat to the public.

And right beside the last Hawkeye was a Karl, which was notorious for its crude design - a height about 16 meters, twice as high as the F-58 and had twice the amount of parts as most of the mechs. In addition, its shield with a height of 10 meters waved like

moving gigantic walls of labyrinth, suffocating indeed, not to mention how Karl wielded both of them. I wonder how people find Karl whenever they spotted one. Imagine an iron hunk of tower-height shoving a giant shield each in his hands. Wild, barbaric, monstrous, savage... There was not much of a good word to describe. The firm dark green mechanical legs it had would move with a terrifying screech that gave goosebumps to anyone who heard it. It was obvious that no one would ever consider to give this colossus some anti-skid build. Its fate had been determined the day it was built with all the low quality and dirt cheap materials. It was born to be an enslaved fighter, the walking ashes in the warfield.

The man who placed Karl and Hawkeye in a group probably just wanted Karl to be the tanker of his eyes. Oh wait, it should be the guardian of his eyes. Karl still held some values in this situation, assuming if they were attacked, Hawkeye could actually make its way out while Karl tried to buy more time holding back the intruders. Sadly, Karl's life was hardly a concern. A moving wall is a moving wall. If it crumbles, it just does. No one else would care.

Ye Chong was rather impressed by the fact that the dead man could come up with such a remarkable combination to shield against possible raids. The high defense of Karl combined with the powerful scanning system of Hawkeye. The eyes and the shield in one place.

Ye Chong sneaked towards the mechs.

He was not expecting the hefty slow Karl to react this quickly! Karl turned his head as soon as Ye Chong started flying towards them. He instantly hid both Hawkeye and himself within the shields he raised. The 10 meter tall shield perfectly covered up the 6 meter tall Hawkeye.

Karl did feel agitated but the pilot did not detect any hostility from the black mech coming towards him. The speed had yet to be increased. It just travelled calmly to his direction. It looked more

like a random passerby to him. Frankly speaking, he had been assuming that he was overreacting to anything coming in his sight the last few days. Those mechs he presumed to be a raider eventually just zoomed away in leisure. He did panic for numerous times at first but as time passed, he got used to his door-guard job and he lowered his guard.

That shielding was out of subconsciousness.

Must be overreacting again this time he thought. I mean who would simply dare to challenge the authority in the public? Especially when this place belonged to the Ji Family. That's like going against God. Only fools would do it... Yeah, I have a point... He moved the shield away from Hawkeye bit by bit as he thought.

Watching how sluggish the black mech flew, the pilot snickered. Only greenhorns would fly like a derp in this speed! Maybe an absolute greenhorn in flights too!

As much as he assumed, the black mech then travelled clumsily towards the pilot, as if it was drunk.

The pilot laughed out loud upon seeing the poor execution by that black mech. What a good chance for an extra entertainment! Today's show would be "Bullying the Noob"! He was unhappy when he was ordered to pilot the junky Karl these few days long. Only garbage would pilot a Karl. It is like a runner-up after another runner-up in the team, a member in the lineup forever. What an insult! But he could not spit it as it was an order from the authority. He stayed quiet and piloted Karl like a moody baby. However, things had changed! Now came a greenhorn to have fun with!

The black mech was inching towards Karl. Hah! That awkward movement! He almost fell a few times! The pilot felt laughter rumbling in his stomach. That was so hilarious! I just can't! He put up a look at that black mech as if he was looking at his pet.

A little bit more. Wait for it... Get to me and we'll play!



# Chapter 67: Black and White

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Ye Chong's pupils shrunk on a whim!

Time to accelerate! Ye Chong's hands hovered over the control panel like a shroud of phantasm.

The F-58 that acted goofy before had advanced in an overpowering speed towards Karl! As if it were on drugs, it charged with spear dazzling ferocity! The pilot in Karl saw his fear becoming real gradually. The cold shine of death magnified in his quivering eyes!

He was saved by the instinct he obtained from intensive training in the past, as he set his shield to the front immediately to protect him and his partner from fatal damages at any cost. There was scarcely time for him to collect his thoughts. His sense of protection just held his teammate up within his mech's right arm.

A man who could still be thinking of his own mates at such a situation.

Ye Chong was impressed.

Heading towards the iron wall in no time, Ye Chong did not seem to be decelerating at all! A slide tilted and Ye Chong skied over the surface of the shield so smoothly as if the shield was lubricated.

Karl who was behind the shield was confused. The expected crash was not coming anytime soon. There was no pressure exerted onto the shield and the hands felt too light for an incoming collision. Huh? A shadow came to the right of Karl. The slow giant was horrified, he could not manage to shift his heavy shield in time, he lifted his elbow towards himself from the strike.

Hawkeye was too absorbed being the watchdog that the pilot only found the existence of the loophole by then. The raider had already sneaked through the iron shield! Hawkeye sent off an emergency signal right away! But there was no response! Hope had

been sunken in the pilot of Hawkeye. Apparently his other mates were done for as well. No one could reach them. The raider must have planned thoroughly for this attack! Such resourcefulness! The thoughts sent chills down his spine, from the bottom right to the top of his head. He shuddered unwillingly. He gestured at Karl to call for cover-up on his escape. He would be running away at maximum speed as he believed he must stay alive to spread the words to the other grunts at the very least!

He switched his engine on. Wham!

He didn't make it. Before he wanted to make his next move, he felt as if he was crashed by a speeding mech. The agony in his body terrorized his remaining muscles. He shrieked seeing half of his body chopped off like hay in a cutter, blood spilling over the weapon like a gruesome graffiti. His head leaned to the side as he lost his consciousness which seemed to be never retrieved afterwards.

Back when Karl arched his arm, F-58 took it like a lever and launched itself to the air. One somersault and the rarely used shield was finally put into use this time. The impact created from F-58's leap disabled Karl's movement temporarily. F-58 stomped on the ground landing and he swiftly sent the shield flying with a fling he made. The shield spun through the gap between Karl and the iron shield, all the way to the running Hawkeye. A critical hit!

The edges of the compound metal shield were extremely honed, plus it flew under the immense strength of F-58's toss, the damage was greater than ever especially when Hawkeye's armor was pathetically weak. The shield pierced through completely like a slice to the apple. Crackles and splutters. The Hawkeye exploded. Having to witness the entire scene, the mechs that happened to be passing by in the air were horrified and nearly lost control.

There was no more need to keep it down anymore. Ye Chong activated his magnetic sword, wanting to end the battle quickly and flee.

Karl had not been making any movement since then, seemingly too astonished by the sudden explosion before him that he did not notice the approaching F-58.

Well, aren't you prepared to die when you are prepared to daze off at such timing? Ye Chong could imagine Karl already dead in his mind, as he waved his magnetic sword like a ferocious serpent as its sting inched towards Karl for a deadly kiss. Ye Chong! A white light blinded Ye Chong as he heard Mu warning, "Look out!"

Karl actually self-destructed? The explosion blew Ye Chong off far away. In a bewilderment, his eyes set upon the tiny dot in the sky. No! It wasn't a suicide! He enlarged the image obtained in the processor. Dammit! That was the white mech going after him last time. Ye Chong could not stop cursing, but it was not the time for that.

The F-58 reached his hands for the ground to stabilize his balance. Bang! He dodged in a tumble right away. I knew it! The attack had yet to be ended as another beam of light struck right before Ye Chong. The F-58 then set close to the floor and zigzagged to the rooftop as he picked up the shield on the way. The frisbee would come in real handy now! He got to the top and jumped off from the building of 500 floors tall.

The white mech chased behind, showing determination in getting Ye Chong real nailed this time!

Dammit! Dammit! Ye Chong called himself in such bad luck of encountering this white mech at this very moment of all times they could have met.

He set himself off into the urban jungle, weaving in between the buildings. That would have worked in the past. However, the white mech seemed to be going real in the hunt. The worst part of the scenario was it would appear that the white mech was aided by the police forces. The color blue, black and white were the typical colors for police officers' mechs and none of theirs were of low-

quality! Most of the mechs were either average or advanced. Under the assistance of police force, they cornered Ye Chong bit by bit.

What could Ye Chong have done? Agitation seared his head. Puzzlement wet his face. "Mu." The communicator of F-58 rang with a familiar voice, "I'm Johansson, do you hear me?" Ye Chong would love to respond but, "No time for words. There's a turning 100 meters in front of you. Meet there!" And he hung up. Gosh! Ye Chong's heart skipped a beat. So the Black Cove are finally getting their hands into this!

He settled his mind and sped up straight. 100 meters were a brief distance to Ye Chong's speed. Any place in that distance was not far-fetched to reach within a blink of an eye. Ye Chong's eyes focused on that very black mech as soon as he arrived.

This must be the war model of the Black Cove! That was the first time Ye Chong saw the exact machinery limited to the Black Covers right before his eyes. He had heard amazing stories about it. But I've never seen it, till today!

The only impression flooding his thought then was - This is the coolest mech I've ever seen!

Hideous! That would be the lasting impression given to every person who had seen this mech. The well-proportioned body glossed in a dreamy darkness, a color inhibited the bloodthirsty will in it; the hooks on the slender wrists, elbows, shoulders, knees and the head flashed like the fangs of the demon lord debuting from the underworld; the scepter about a meter half at the right arm, along with the chains wrapped over which the endings were kept inside the mech - wondering what it actually could do.

A magnetic sword kept at the crossing of its back. Came in a pair, about 3 meters long each.

The armguard on its left was rather easily overlooked, which could be pretty good considering what the mech was made for. The sharp edges were hidden within the coat of black paint. The

ulterior of the legs had the same pair of scepters too, with the rising spikes installed at the heels. Well for the hidden firepower... I couldn't tell how many shooting cartridges he hid.

"Five." Enlightened Mu, "5 cartridges were hidden."

An absolute killer machine! Ye Chong could not stop complimenting the machinery in his mind. Imagine with such firepower, combined with Johansson's rapid attacking skills - the destruction this mech could potentially create would be more than overwhelming! The apparent setup must not be it! There had to be more, considering it a mech from the Black Cove. It should have some other fearsome modifications not known by a glance! Terrifying. Unpredictable!

Ye Chong shifted his view onto his own F-58. It was at the other extreme on a scale with the black mech. It just felt so half-baked in comparison with Johansson's war machine. If he were to have a duel with Johansson in a F-58, no matter how much more skillful he was than Johansson, he would lose inevitably.

"Those men are from the association." Johansson spoke gravely, "And we are finishing them right here, together!"

As planned, both of them took the sides of the crossing each. Hiding in darkness, Ye Chong tried to piece everything together in his mind. Association? Did he mean the FMPA? Wait, so the FMPA is actually the nemesis of Black Cove? Ever since he got out of the Black Cove, Ye Chong showed disdain towards the certification system in FMPA. The pilots certified by the so-called "association of the galaxy" could hardly be called potent. Nevertheless, he never expected the day that he would be dumbfounded by someone from the FMPA. The super-advanced mechs that have been hunting me were all from the FMPA? The pilot inside that white mech might be inferior to Ye Chong's skills but was still way above the average "advanced pilots" holding fancy certificates in the field. He was from the FMPA too?

How would the Black Cove become the enemy to the FMPA?

It did not make sense to Ye Chong. "Here it comes!" Johansson boomed. Everything happened so fast, Ye Chong simply did not have the leisure to go through the scenes again.

The white mech gracefully emerged in the crossing at first, which the grace was lost upon seeing two mechs at the crossing awaiting for its arrival. The white mech appeared to have flinched seeing Johansson's fearsome machine.

"Do it!" Johansson shouted and pounced at the white mech straightaway. The speed was unlooked for to the white mech as it went easily a stage faster than F-58.

The white mech calmed down fairly quick and backed off with dexterity a strange-looking gun in the hand aiming at Johansson.

"You... You!" Johansson's angry voice ran deep and profound.

# Chapter 68: Getting Away with Murder

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Ye Chong backed away, absconding from the scene!

It's now or never. Ye Chong might have seemed foolish for not understanding the bread and butter of routine in humanity, although he was not utterly foolish. He snorted. He knew the situation well enough - if the white mech was ever annihilated, he would be the next target in Johansson's eyes and would not stand a chance to even grapple! Thinking back about what had happened at the Black Cove, Ye Chong could smell the distinct danger in the air. His intuition was justified by Mu's analysis which suggested Johansson showing a hidden enmity. Well then, why should I stay back and be skewed when I can run?

If only I have a proper mech, I would have... hhnnggh!

Ye Chong felt dejected for his helplessness.

A stab for Johansson as a farewell gift? Ye Chong's mischievous mind feared the idea. Judging by the tone when Johansson spoke to him, anyone could have guessed Johansson's intention of dragging him back to the Black Cove. Johansson did not seem to be keen at murder. However, if only the white mech remained and Johansson actually wanted to get rid of him, it would be the same old bad ending he imagined in his mind...

Ye Chong backed out right when Johansson shouted to initiate the attack, which left Johansson stupefied after pouncing at the white mech. "Why you little-" said Johansson angrily, yet he had better things to worry about, like his own safety. The white mech pointed the gun at Johansson.

Ye Chong did not seem bothered because he was not aware of what that strange-looking gun in the white mech's hand was. Nonetheless, it was not the same for Johansson. He recognized the gun since he had been infiltrating the FMPA's database the moment he got his own war machine. He had read through the

profiles of his nemesis.

The white mech is known elegantly as the "Messenger" - as angelic as it may sound, it is a commonly used unmodified mechs among the aces of the FMPA.

And that gun, known as "Javelin Angel-V", is the true original weapon used by the experts in the association, named after the semicircle curving over the body like wings, glossing in fair pearl white like an angel. It looks more like an art than a killing weapon.

A .20 caliber gun might seem too minuscule to do anything to a mech of 10 meters tall. However, the caliber does not matter, but what it fires does. It would be a total different outcome providing that it fires nano waves. Calculated based on the Thomson's law, the nano waves could effortlessly devastate the whole fifty-story building at the maximum capacity of the gun. Given by how there was never a letup from the FMPA, one could already imagine how powerful the gun could be.

Johansson hmphed. He displayed no fright. His eyes were cold. The archival held more than just a grudge towards each other. If the Black Cove never played dirty it would have been long wiped. Johansson recognized the situation. With Black Cove's strength it shall never be wiped out for real. Though it was a bit unacceptable for Johansson that the FMPA could put up with the Black Cove for this long.

Johansson placed the arm shield before his chest. Zzzzzt! A layer of strange rays started emitting from his dark shield and shrouded Johansson's body in plasma, which shaped like a slightly dented shield over him and his Cosmic Flare. He then got onto his black mech, the Cosmic Flare.

Johansson moved evasively. Even though he was much slower than Ye Chong in terms of steering, the impressive Cosmic Flare covered up the holes, thus making Johansson a much better driver than Ye Chong on his underdeveloped F-58.



He did not assume that such little trick could chase the enemy away and of course he was not that dumb to assume that would evade them either. The Messenger possessed an impeccable lock-on system that aided less skillful pilots to nail the hit by halving duration of the entire input sequence using its automatic and guided lock-on function which would only sacrifice negligible quantity of accuracy in exchange.

A ray of scorching lilac glared towards Johansson! The transparent plasma shield shook violently for a moment. I knew it! That has to be the nano waves fired from Javelin Angel-V! The shield stabilized quickly. However to Johansson's horror, he noticed the sharp drop of the battery after the first strike. Fortunately it was also exhausting for Javelin Angel-V to sustain the firepower - if the info obtained was accurate that is...

The possibility of dodging the next attack was meager enough to encourage Johansson to just advance forward fearlessly under his plasma shield. As soon as I get close enough I could finish this guy off in one blow. He travelled towards the enemy, disregarding the possibly massive damage coming at him.

This was the typical brawl between members of FMPA and Black Cove. The Black Covers maintained movements that were more complicated, more depleting with their enhanced physique and dexterity of their hands to complete the input - the archetypal Black Covers; while the FMPA pilots would pull punches with the more avant-garde and automated machineries made out of their flawless craftsmanship to remedy their physical fragility - the classic FMPA members.

The pilots from the Black Cove were known for their combative skills, so one could picture the otherworldly strength in close-combats with the Black Covers. The technology at the Black Cove might be seemingly incompetent compared to the FMPA, but that did not mean they were outdated. The mechs used in Black Cove were contrarily in a status-quo of the leading position when put

into comparison with the unmodified mechs in the current market, which makes them ultimately unique in combats for they were those who combined potent pilots and mechs along with bizarre weaponry.

Since the mechs used by the Black Covers were already known to be prime, then the more developed mech technology at the FMFA had to be the greatest. The most sophisticated processor, the most inventive engines, the most pioneering choice of materials, the most innovative mech designs and together they form the most groundbreaking mech in the galaxy. Intellectualization of mech was the breakthrough they achieved where they were possible to make the best decision in a presented scenario within an extremely brief period of time under the assistance of the processor installed. Moreover, they had also created the top ranged weapons with dazzling variety and compelling forces, hence their style of ranged attacks with high mobility was determined.

And that meant the Messenger would be in hot water any moment soon. Johansson charged and had already aimed the possible alley the Messenger could have blinked to if it were to escape, which certainly led to his victory in the end. It could have been a perfect victory, if Ye Chong did not surprise him with that last-minute runaway, in which the Messenger could have escaped back then.

Ye Chong was scurrying from the scene on his mech. There was no way he would turn back now. All engines, maximum speed! He zigzagged through the buildings, trying to hide himself within the ground, though he knew it well that the two big machines could have been too busy fighting each other dead or alive to even care about Ye Chong. It was rather delightful to have lost that white mech. Without that white mech escorting, the police mechs were no longer an issue. A turn here and a spin there, a leap and a sink, through that alley and over the fence, he finally left the proximity of police forces.

Ye Chong went on flying calmly. His mech was too eye-catching, Ye Chong thought it through, wondering if there were more of those white mechs going after him. As for his appearance, only Johansson knew, so he probably would not be identified. Thanks to Johansson who held the annoying mech for me, I can now go into hiding. Ye Chong was feeling smug.

"Oh well, sigh." Ye Chong thought back about beautifully-crafted mech Johansson owned, with envy he lamented to Mu, "How I wish I had that kind of mech, Mu."

"Well according to calculations based on the data given, the chances are below 10%." Mu flatly analyzed.

"The heck, Mu, how did you even calculate that?" Ye Chong was astonished.

"It's simple. It's based on the original mathematical model proposed by Austin, in conjunction with the combination of the fuzzy theory with multi-variation probability, thus the possibility to calculate your case, Ye Chong."

"Sometimes I just wish you speak English, Mu." Ye Chong scratched his head, "And I also wish you could be more sentimental."

"Sentimental means: of, or prompted by feelings of tenderness, sadness or nostalgia. Based on my reading, it is blatant that you do not possess such quality." A comeback from Mu.

"What!" Ye Chong screamed in his mind, "Mu, do you mean I am not sentimental?"

"That is correct." Mu replied.

"Why you..."

In the midst of mutual-teasing, Ye Chong heard someone calling from his back.

# Chapter 69: Yang An's Invitation

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Ever since Ye Chong met Mu, his usual mumbo-jumbo had gradually reduced. He had been communicating with Mu through telepathy. To the people around, he no longer appeared to be muttering to himself, instead, he stayed all quiet.

Ye Chong turned over towards the direction of the voice calling. It was Sun Xuelin and Shew coming towards him along with 3 other young men. A glance through the gang, his eyes identified the uniqueness of the man in the center, who seemed to be the eldest as he walked in a fairly steady and mature manner; while the man on his right was a bit more buffed, apparently someone who had undergone a certain kind of special training. Though he had an evenly flexible looking limbs, he still did not look fluid enough, which indicated that he would have issues mastering the control of his strength; the other on the left was much more undersized, or even puny, but he did have a nice pair of hands which gave Ye Chong an impression being quite nimble.

Ye Chong's careful observation on a person always started with the person's behavior, the physique then tiny details like their gestures. Contrary to the norms, he did not show concern of one's facial appearance.

Hmph! Xuelin's face was all puffy and steaming as she stood at the side, turning her face away from Ye Chong while Shew, her cousin pulled Xuelin's sleeve, signaling her to behave.

"Greetings Mister." The leading man smiled kindly as he initiated, "You must be that very Ye Miss Xuelin had mentioned. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Yang An and we had heard about your amazing skills from Miss Xuelin. We certainly appreciate your accommodating nature willing to assist Miss Xuelin repairing her mech. So regarding the price you had offered before, we accept it wholeheartedly. Would you mind, by all means, to join our establishment?"

Ye Chong's mind was clogged with the long-winded introduction.

Hmm... Hmmmm... Oh!

He got what the man meant - they are paying. "Okay, good!" He spoke on.

Ye Chong was acting nonchalantly towards such a lovely offer but the leader Yang An did not seem to mind the attitude at all, "So let me carry on introducing my men. This is Ke Han, the pilot of our group. And this is Ding Yining, our ace student from the mechanic school, who is very familiar with mech modification and would be providing you assistance."

Ke Han was trying to be friendly at first but Ye Chong's indifference was enraging to him. It was not really because of Ye Chong putting up an attitude, but rather because Ye Chong appeared to be too engaged chatting with Mu in his mind to bother what Yang An spoke.

"Based on the data I had received, Johansson has about 87% chance of achieving victory in that fight against the white mech. The white mech on the other hand has measly 10% success rate of escaping and 3% chance of winning," reported Mu flatly.

"Well that sounds like Johansson had won the fight!" Ye Chong was confident that he could have won if he were to pilot Johansson's mech, considering how even Johansson could win in the end.

Suddenly a number of mechs soared through the sky in lightning speed, which created an airflow against the sleeves of people on the ground. Ye Chong lifted his head and nearly got a heart attack because those happened to be the exact same white mech he had encountered before.

Johansson must have defeated the white mech, so the ally came to the rescue. Ye Chong counted the number of white mechs in his mind. One, two, three... six... seven. Hehehe, Johansson is in

trouble.

While Yang An continued blabbering things Ye Chong did not bother, Ke Han's impression towards Ye Chong had just taken a turn to the worse. He glared on, hoping that Ye Chong would realize his ill manner. But well, even if Ye Chong did notice his attitude, he would not repent for his "ill manner" too.

Yang An seemed to be also a little agitated in his eyes. He retained his smile as he spoke on, "Very well. Maybe we should try on working something now, just to break the ice. How about that? Mister."

"O...Oh.." Ye Chong shifted his focus back to the conversation, "Okay... Sure...", knowing that the person still wanted to test him out despite all those unnecessary respects in act.

They got onto their transportation and moved to the base.

It was a giant storage with all sorts of parts and tools for mech of different models. It was so messy that the tools looked as if they were suffocating.

The weak Ding Yining rubbed his palms in slight embarrassment, "Hahaha... I'm sorry. This place is a little messy sometimes. I usually work alone here so I don't really do cleanups."

Ye Chong took a glance at the parts scattered on the ground. From the moment he had seen that black mech from Black Cove and the white mech from FMFA, he no longer fancied these ordinary mechs stuck in the storage. Any advanced mech even like the F-58 would have looked modest in front of the mighty Black Cove gears, let alone that super overpowered war machines Johansson drove and that Messenger the FMFA pilot sniped with.

He could not find a good reason himself to explain the vast difference of quality between the so-called advanced mechs sold in the market and the real deal in Black Cove and FMFA.

Who are the Black Cove and FMFA seriously?

Questions of different kinds mushroomed in Ye Chong's thoughts.

But, well, there is a time and place for everything, but not now...

"Sooo... What kind of mechs do you guys need?" Ye Chong asked.

"Speed. All speed. We only need speed. Well of course, it would be better if we get some mobility." Ke Han stepped to the front and replied excitedly.

Such requirement actually reminded Ye Chong of that blue paperweight he had a race with in the street back then. That bottle-head setting...

"What about firepower?"

"Nope." Ke Han shook his head, "Does not require."

"What about defense?"

"Nope." Ke Han shook his head again, "I only want speed. What I want is a mech specialized for races."

Sounds like that blue paper mech I met last time. But for Pete's sake what the heck can that kind of mech do? Run?

Ye Chong wanted to question Ke Han's concept but he was too lazy for a fruitless discussion. Since the employer asked for a racing mech, he would give him a racing mech.

He then inquired this future pilot of the mech regarding some essential factors to be taken into consideration for designs, including height, weight, habits of controlling, optimum speed of his hands and so on.

Ye Chong knotted his brows while conversing with Ke Han and sometimes he went dazed. He walked to and fro performing calculations and simulations on the processor in the storage.

It lasted for 30 minutes and right when the people started to get impatient, Ye Chong finally came up with the ultimate modification plan.

Yining took a look at Ye Chong's blueprint and out of sudden, the eyes lustered with desire as well as amazement, like a famished wolf spotting a fat lamb in the field.

"Perfect... This is too perfect! Oh my gosh!! You are a genius!" Yining could not stop exclaiming as his eyes fixed on Ye Chong with adore. Yining even felt like kneeling down and pleading Ye Chong to be his master. But there was no time for that! The next thing Yining did was storming into the mountain of parts to obtain those mentioned in Ye Chong's plan at full speed. Yining rushed in and out madly.

Apparently, the owner of this storage, Yining also happened to be a mech maniac. Thankfully Yining's storage had all the things Ye Chong would need in building this mech. Or else, he could not swear that he would make it.

There were a variety of tools and strange parts scattered around in the storage. Ye Chong could barely recognize most of the tools. Frankly speaking, some of them also happened to be his first encounter. There was no way he could use those tools. But then, it did not mean that there was nobody else who could use the tools for him. The owner Yining knew the place and the tools well enough. Plus, Yining was all proactive and passionate. Ye Chong could just sit aside, point his fingers around and watch things happen.

Ye Chong would be informing the materials and the parts needed, along with specific ways of modifying certain parts, while Yining did all the work - literally Ye Chong was being the contractor of this construction.

Yining's skill was aided with odd gadgets and carried out with full efficiency and effectiveness, which was an eye-opener to Ye Chong. He observed Yining carefully and learned the tricks bit by bit with heart.

After approximately 4 hours of hard work on building the new



machines, they eventually got to the grand opening of a newborn mech.

# Chapter 70: Gliding Joy

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The moment had arrived! A newborn mech was to be sent into the sky soaring like a bird, freely and... When everyone saw the post-modification, their eyes were filled with confusion, looking at Ye Chong. Yining who had been working hard for the past hours went dumbfounded upon seeing the mech he modified with his own hands looking like this.

Is this crap still a mech?

This was probably what everyone else had in mind.

The mech was in a shape of an arrow, with a tapering body from cabin to the end. The body was much narrower than before, but taller, like a flattened swordfish; while the main engine was shifted to the very end. It was all according to Ye Chong's calculation, where the placement of center of gravity would be ideal. The front was the "arrowhead" with the side wings forming a V shape towards the fore, unlike before when it used to be a flimsy metallic strip and multiple additional engines were installed to promote a larger scope of redirection. The design was an innovation but also a challenge to the pilot as the cabin had been moved to the body of the mech, the "shaft" where it only offered limited space for body movement, just enough to fit Ke Han sitting in. No wonder Ye Chong asked him about the height and the weight. Also as the entire cabin had become cramped, the processor was replaced with a much smaller one which served less functions. Technically if it was a mech made for Ye Chong, he would hardly need a processor and could just play manually. But Yining was the one strongly against this because a mech was believed to be worthless without a processor inside.

The mech was mainly built using light titanium alloy, which durability might appeared substandard, but it served better for its featherweight. The engine used was Firebird-III and it was not because of its dynamic, rather, again, it was because of its weight

being merely half of the other engines of similar grades and most importantly it offered the largest scope of redirection in the group. Most of the main engines only served the purpose of providing momentum to the mech and it wholly depended on the additional engines to make direction changes. However, there happened to be some rare kinds that could do both, though they offer a smaller scope of redirection. Firebird-III from this category was the most outstanding in direction control being a main engine, thus it became Ye Chong's choice. Of course, such an overpowered-sounding engine was not a common selection by the public for it consumed high amount of energy. It might had half of the weight of engines of similar grade, but in return it had twice the amount of energy depletion as the other engines in its line, which drastically restrained its application. For instance, the mech Ye Chong designed could sustain a nonstop flight for a limited duration of 8 hours when fully charged at most. Such a flaw Ye Chong thought it was that he asked Ke Han for opinion but he did not show much disagreement considering how he was only required a 2 hour flight in the tournament. That was more than enough.

Yining proceeded to paint the whole mech in blue - a blue like a pool of clear lake. The strange design did actually made the mech look much more striking, forceful with its hollowed body. The team was looking forward to its performance.

They looked at each other and nodded. Somehow they read each other pretty well. They agreed the fact that it was their first time seeing such an odd mech. It would be more appropriate to call it an aircraft instead. Ke Han was thrilled to try on his new toy that he felt like hopping into the cabin right away.

Up, up, and away! Ke Han set off into the sky!

For moments on ground, they had been anticipating Ke Han's return to hear his words about the new craft.

Ke Han finally made it back - literally made it back. It was not as

heartwarming as coming home because Ke Han crawled out of his cabin with his face drained, his legs shaking. "H...hi...f...folks."

They quickly went to Ke Han. "Han!" Yang An asked hurriedly, "What's wrong?"

"To...tt...Ttt...Too fast! Th...Th...This is... inten...ss...intense!" He caught his breath, settled his mind, "There were a few times I nearly crashed into people! It's too hard to control!" But he seemed all pumped and enthusiastic, "Still, it's fast, too fast! I guess I could already be a professional racer at this rate. It's too fun!"

Xuelin who was standing at the side seemed quite eager to try while Shew acted a scaredy cat holding Xuelin back at her sleeve.

Yining gazed endearingly at the mech he made out with his own hands. "Hmmm..." he mumbled. "What name shall we bestow this baby?"

"Glidy!" Ke Han waddled to Yining, "How about Glidy?"

"Glidy just sounds stupid." Xuelin shook her head in strong disapproval, "A single-word name never worked. Hmm, how about Gliding Joy?" It was a suggestion coming from a beauty, and without a doubt, Ke Han approved and Yining seemed pleased with the name too. "How about Ye Ch-" Ye Chong, the designer, the contractor of the construction carried on watching the folks uninterestedly, guessing the man did not bother what the mech would be named after.

And so be it!

The name of this modified mech had been decided among the folks without much discussion.

"Well." Ye Chong looked at the time - it was time to scram for him. He stood up and spoke to Yang An, "4 hours in total. Every hour costed you 1225 Zuan. That'd be 5000 Zuan in total. Payment at your convenience!" His tone was monotonous. He did not sound mortified as he asked for his pay.

Tch! Xuelin spat her tongue in disdain and dragged Shew aside.

On the other hand, Yang An acted truly easygoing in this. He paid Ye Chong the price as he acknowledged his capability, knowing if he joined the alliance, the team would have greater odds to win.

Yining carried on gazing at Ye Chong's blueprint in endearment, while Ke Han's eyes still glued at Gliding Joy. His hands could not stop fondling his baby from the tip to the end, the shaft and then the wings.

Xuelin was having another private conversation with Shew at the corner. Their whispers rumbled.

Ye Chong seemed to have heard his name being mentioned in their discussion, but well... Do I really care? These two are just a bunch of weird people. I don't have time for them.

He confirmed the transaction on his identity card. 5000 Zuans in. Done. He briefly bade farewell to them and walked away after that.

Back to the streets seeing the crowd, Ye Chong then realized it was actually the peak hour of his noodle shop! That was more frightening than anything else! He got to get back to Grandpa Qian or the loss would be beyond estimation! He ran, dashed, hurtled and sprinted through the streets, like a fired bullet through the air. The pedestrians saw a shadow flying by and they panicked just to see nothing. Most of them thought they were just feeling a little under the weather.

Ye Chong hurried back to the shop and indeed it was swarmed with customers. Grandpa Qian was running back and forth, looking really fatigued. Ye Chong, with a slight guilt, greeted Grandpa Qian and rushed into the kitchen to begin his work.

Grandpa Qian returned to the front desk and let go a sigh of relief.

When the last batch of customers left at about 8 at night, they had dinner and hit the bed after a short good-night to each other.

Then nothing else happened.

Except for Ye Chong.

He locked his room and carefully took out the chip he pilfered from the dead man's building back then. The chip had only recorded worthless information about Grandpa Xu's whereabouts. Well the only surprising discovery was from the identity cards he obtained from the men he killed, as Mu's immense processing ability located the background of these people.

"So they are from the Ji Family?" Ye Chong asked.

"Probably about 95% the likelihood according to the data acquired." Mu answered.

"That's just another way to say yes. Well then, why are the Jis on Grandpa Xu?" he asked on.

Mu then gave a brief introduction on Ji Family's background. Ye Chong understood the entire scenario after that. It had to be because of the new theory from Grandpa Xu that they desired. That was why they tried all sorts of ways to get Grandpa Xu into their group. And obviously Grandpa Xu would not buy any of their dirty tricks. Practically, those tricks were not that dirty to Ye Chong, considering how he would have used a much dirtier trick if he were the Jis.

Yet! It does not mean I am fine with what they have done to Grandpa Xu! Understanding does not translate approval, especially when he was involved.

Well then, by now the Ji Family should have heard of the news.

Keeping that thought, he logged into the virtual world and left a note at the Aurora, informing Grandpa Xu that he would be busy working on something and he might not be visiting anytime soon.

The Ji Family huh?

Ye Chong snickered.

# Chapter 71: Operation

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It was night, and Ye Chong moved silently like a spirit through the darkness. The night provided the best cover for Ye Chong; if it was in space, Ye Chong would not dare to move so freely, even with his F-58. While there was more radiation in space, the geography was less complicated. Scanning systems can be used to their full potential in such terrains. On the other hand, within the atmosphere, the various environment severely restricted the effective perimeter of the scanning system, besides significantly decreasing its accuracy. Most importantly, the government has strict rules regarding atmospheric scanning, such as allowed scanning frequencies, methods and so on.

The fact was that the F-58, with its advanced anti-detection system, would be the best candidate for the task at hand, but Ye Chong was unsure if Johansson's mech had a special communication link with the F-58. Hence, he kept the F-58 undeployed.

In fact, the best time to infiltrate the Ji family was immediately after he killed the surveillance team, and before the Ji family received the news. Now that the Ji family was informed, security would be tightened. However, his infiltration was planned entirely by Mu. When Ye Chong noticed that Mu had gathered a large amount of data about the Ji family, he made the rational decision of letting Mu plan for the infiltration. Ye Chong had absolute trust in Mu. Mu did not explain the details of their operation, but only calculated the probability of the final outcome. The probability of success was 72 percent; the probability of failure and successful retreat was 20 percent; and the probability of dying mid-operation was 8 percent.

Ye Chong felt that attacking the Ji family now would not deal a big enough blow, since he was not exactly powerful, and would risk exposing himself. However, Mu had insisted on the operation,

and Ye Chong believed that there must be a good reason behind it, for Mu would not do anything carelessly.

Ye Chong carefully moved in the shadows as he always did when hunting on the trash planet. The mutants were far more alert than humans, and had uniquely enhanced senses, such as an incredible sense of smell and, more generally, highly sensitive hearing. The most problematic for Ye Chong were mutants that could see infrared light.

Multichromatic lightings illuminated the night, as the gorgeous lights winked at each other. Seen from above, one would find it a mesmerising sight. The superstars in holographic advertisements looked more enchanting than they were during the day. The safety lights from the mechs flying above made them look like a sprinkle of dancing fireflies.

Ye Chong was not in the mood to appreciate the scene that would have been impossible on the trash planet. Within the shadows of the dark, he was now moving silently like a cold-blooded venomous snake.

Ye Chong carefully kept himself concealed as he asked, "Mu, what're our objective for this operation? Don't keep me guessing!"

Mu lightly replied, "You'll know when it's time. Based on available information, the probability of you understanding then is 91 percent."

Ye Chong nearly tripped at the mech's response. "Of course I'll know then! I meant now!"

Mu continued calmly, "Based on available information, there is still an 8 percent probability of you not understanding by then. As for now, I regret to inform you that my calculation results indicates that the probability of you guessing right is 0 percent."

Ye Chong cursed to himself. "Damn it Mu, are you saying I'm stupid?"



Mu kept his cool. "Logically speaking, that is absolutely accurate!"

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Ye Chong carefully hid himself behind an artificial tree and examined the base closely. Every 15 minutes, a few small mechanical birds would fly over the area. Their bodies were equipped with amplified scanning devices that greatly increased the scanning perimeter and accuracy. However, Ye Chong managed to hide in a blind spot under Mu's guidance.

Ye Chong asked, "Mu, what is this place?"

Mu ignored him and said, "Ye, you should be able to avoid detection with the F-58!"

Ye Chong acknowledged, and deployed the F-58.

Mu immediately spoke, "Hurry!" Ye Chong was surprised at the mech's anxiety, and dared not take his time. He slipped into the cabin quickly and immediately started the engines.

As expected, the F-58 did not alert the other party's scanning system. Ye Chong was thinking of moving in a discrete manner forward, but Mu spoke up, "Fly straight ahead!"

Ye Chong hesitated, but quickly recovered and flew as directed. However, he found it strange that the people moving about the area seemed to ignore the F-58, or even outright waved at him as a greeting - and that was how he flew openly into the area. Ye Chong could not keep up with what was happening, and failed to see the reason behind their actions.

The people here put heavy trust in the base's scanning system, and did not think that someone could enter without going through proper identification. Everyone thought that the F-58 was a mech from the base.

However, Mu had no intention of explaining, and only spoke lightly, "You now have only three minutes. After three minutes,

Johansson will be here, and there's a 78 percent probability that he'll know your rough location."

Ye Chong broke into a cold sweat!

Mu ignored him and continued, "You must reach this area within one minute!" The F-58's photon processor immediately produced holographic schematics for the base. At the north west corner was a basement about twenty meters underground, overlaid with a bright red spot - that was Ye Chong's destination.

"Damn it Mu, you ..." Ye Chong gave up with his cursing, and promptly accelerated ahead.

Mu was deliberately calm. "Ye, don't rush! At your speed, there's a 94 percent probability of reaching your destination!' Ye Chong was greatly agitated - when he heard that Johansson would arrive in three minutes, his first thought was to leave his mech and escape. "Is this a joke? The two mechs are not even on the same level, I have zero chance of winning. Not escaping? Do you want me to die?"

However, Mu's words seemed to be layered with some unfathomable meaning. While Ye Chong continued to curse Mu on the inside, he still flew ahead at top speed.

In just five seconds, Ye Chong arrived directly above the basement. The horizontal metal alloy door was 100 meters wide and 30 meters tall, and it was grew larger and larger in his vision.

When Ye Chong was 50 meters away from the door, Mu suddenly spoke up, "Send out the identification signal!"

Ye Chong caught his breath at the order; already his hands were moving at top speed without thinking. On Black Cove, Ye Chong's hands could move up to [Mach 5.54](#); after breaking the bottleneck, his speed was reaching Mach 7, which was an astounding figure.

However, even with his speed, Ye Chong nearly choked as he executed his new order that came without prior warning.

Fortunately, Ye Chong managed an abrupt halt, as the F-58 stopped just about two meters above the door. The identification signal was sent just before the mech came to a halt.

As Ye Chong recovered himself, he was faced with another dilemma. "Signalling the other party with an identification, isn't that suicidal?"

To his surprise, the alloy door began to slowly slide open, and beyond the door was absolutely complete darkness!

Mach: unit for speed, where Mach 1 is the speed of sound (around 340 m/s), and Mach 0.5 is half the speed of sound (and so on).

# Chapter 72: Into the Depths

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Ye Chong slowly and carefully maneuvered the F-58 into the basement. The mech scanned the surroundings over and over at its maximum capacity, as Ye Chong grew more and more tense.

"Why would Mu want me to come here? What is it here exactly that caught Mu's attention so much?" Ye Chong was filled with questions, but dared not be distracted by them at the moment. Mu had no intention of explaining since the beginning, at least not until he reached the end of the operation!

Ye Chong could not help but be excited! The peaceful days before this did not dull his yearning for battle; on the contrary, since he was accustomed to the cruel lifestyle on the trash planet, Ye Chong was uncomfortable with the peace, even as he tried his best to get used to the vastly different way of life. He could not change over a decade of his habits and lifestyle overnight!

"It's been ages since I had a real battle!" Ye Chong could feel his blood boiling! Strictly speaking, Ye Chong was not exactly trigger-happy, as he had only battled to survive. However, battles had always made him excited.

"Perhaps, there'll be a nasty fight today!"

The scanning system did not detect anyone around, and that surprised Ye Chong. "This is obviously an important place, how could there be no one around? Besides, I just went through the door with a valid identification, how can that be?"

From the moment Ye Chong entered the door, Mu spoke in unprecedented urgency, "In thirty seconds, reach the eleventh level below by then. The ten levels above it are now accessible with your identification. Keep the F-58, quickly!"

Ye Chong dared not hesitate, and slipped out of the F-58 at once. The mech was withdrawn into its alternate dimension before Ye

Chong hit the ground. As his feet touched the ground, Ye Chong's legs moved with explosive strength, following the route that was shown on the schematics earlier by Mu.

It was pitch black, and even Ye Chong's superior vision left him blinded. Ye Chong could only run forward based on his memory of the route. However, Mu did not correct him, and so he assumed that he remembered the route correctly.

Suddenly, a sliver of light came into view ahead - a silver metallic door slid open from the center, and the opening was the source of brightness. Even as he was running, Ye Chong noticed the odd fact that the door seemed more like a wall from his side before it slid open.

Mu must have did something with his identification!

Beyond the door was a slope angled at 45 degrees, paved with anti-slip material. The slope went on for about fifty meters before connecting to a corridor that formed a T-junction. Ye Chong chose to go left without hesitation. There were many code-secured entrances along the way, but whenever Ye Chong approached them, the doors would open for him. This puzzled Ye Chong, but he knew that it was probably due to Mu's tricks. He would ask Mu when they get back home, as this was obviously not the time nor place for questions.

Ye Chong felt like he had entered a space devoid of other human beings. However, he only remembered the route for the first 5 levels. The corridors were a web of complicated lefts and rights, and all the twists and turnings had made Ye Chong lost his sense of direction. Even as he was confused by the directions, Ye Chong still managed to feel awed by the designs used to prevent infiltration - it was a truly clever design!

However, Mu's presence meant that the current obstacle did not stop Ye Chong from moving forward!

Finally, he reached the tenth level. Ye Chong ran with all his

might as Mu spoke up, "I need ten seconds for the eleventh level! Deploy me now!"

"Mu's making his move?" Ye Chong was surprised, but did as he was told - Mu appeared within the corridors in the next instant.

Mu's large hull still managed to look light and agile in the narrow corridors, and Ye Chong could barely keep up with Mu as he sped up following him.

Mu gave a few more orders to Ye Chong, and, in the blink of an eye, the two arrived before the door on the eleventh level.

This door was obviously different from the rest - while the ten alloy doors before it were equipped with identification mechanisms, the current door on the eleventh level was devoid of any devices, and Ye Chong was greatly startled by that fact!

Mu stood before the alloy door of the eleventh level, his bionic eyes were flashing in a frenzy. Ye Chong stood beside the door as Mu suggested, his legs slightly bent in preparation and his dagger in hand. Man and machine were silent throughout their maneuvers.

As expected, after ten seconds, the doors slid open, and Ye Chong rushed through the opening between the door panels like a ghost and slipped through!

"There're two people beyond the door, as expected as well!" Ye Chong thought to himself!

Prepared for the encounter, Ye Chong slashed his dagger through the air like lightning!

The two people beyond the door did not expect the door to suddenly open. Two dark flashes of movement filled their eyes in disbelief, before their throats were marked with a thin slit of blood that spread quickly outwards. After a slight pause, a soft "pop" sounded, and blood sprayed from the throats of the two victims.

The two guards watched Ye Chong with disbelief, and slowly fell

to the ground, silent throughout their final ordeal.

The whole process was neatly and efficiently done; the two victims did not even manage to sound the alarm right beside them. The automatic alarm system was already disabled by Mu.

Ye Chong and Mu did not waste any more time as they moved forward posthaste.

They were greeted by a large roundish chamber, over 100 meters across. In the center of the chamber, there were a few concentric silver rings on the floor. The rest of the chamber was filled with a variety of mechs. The mechs shined with an attractive luster, painted in enchanting, interweaving colours of bright silver, ocean blue, light emerald and fiery red. These mechs stood quietly in the chamber like silent soldiers, filling the chamber with a mysterious attractive quality.

These were all rare and advanced level mechs, and some were even limited editions. There were many that Ye Chong had never even heard of, and his eyes glowed with yearning from his long deprivation of mechs. These were not just run-of-the-mill products! Some of the mechs had accessories gathered at their feet, and Ye Chong noticed with his keen eyes that many of them were top of the line!

Could these mechs be the reason Mu brought him here?

Ye Chong could not help but feel that that something was wrong. While these mechs were advanced and top grade, they were still not as good as the F-58. The F-58 might look ugly and unwieldy, its performance was still above the mechs in the chamber. Black Cove's strength was truly admirable!

"How can Mu not notice that? It's impossible!" Ye Chong immediately dismissed his undoubtedly silly idea!

He looked towards Mu, and saw the mech standing at the center of the concentric circles in the chamber, as his bionic eyes flashed

wildly. Ye Chong paused at the sight - could there be something to this place?

As expected, after fifteen seconds, Mu spoke hastily, "Ye, quickly!"

Ye Chong promptly stepped onto the silver circles. Before he could steady himself, he felt the ground below him vanish, and Ye Chong staggered. Fortunately, he was sharp enough to grab hold onto Mu beside him in time, thus avoiding a fall!

The silver concentric circles carried Ye Chong and Mu silently downwards!



# Chapter 73: Success

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Ye Chong stared in bewilderment at the two huge mechs before him!

The horizontally laid mechs were evidently just completed; Ye Chong could even detect the smell of volatile paint in the air. Support frames and stabilization structures were still in place at many different parts of the mechs.

Of the two mechs, one was in a combination of dim blue and ivory white, while the other had alternating shades of bright red and glowing silver.

Ye Chong's eyes glowed with interest - he knew immediately from experience that these two mechs were special! It seemed that there was still someone else with mech technology comparable to that of Black Cove and the [MPA](#)! Ye Chong couldn't help but marvel at the two machines! These two mechs were definitely not of lesser quality than Johansson's black war mech or the MPA's white mech!

Mu prompted him, "Choose one now, you only have one minute of designated time left!"

Ye Chong snapped out of his reverie and suppressed his overjoyed emotions. He did not have time to inspect the two mechs in detail, but Ye Chong slipped into the blue-white mech's cabin without hesitation. The red-silver mech came with a formidable shooting weapon, and Ye Chong knew from a glance that it was a mech with a long range battle style. This was why he chose the blue-white mech - after all, that kind of battle style did not suit him well.

Inside the cabin, the floor was still littered with debris. Ye Chong did not make time for a closer inspection, as he began performing the initial settings as fast as he could! The initial setup was complicated, and Ye Chong felt slightly daunted by the task, but immediately rejoiced at the fact that a more complicated initial

setup process implied that the mech was more advanced.

Ye Chong put on the helmet and focused on the various messages that appeared in his vision, wary of any distractions! Not that he was open to any form of distractions, since the messages on the holographic screen came pouring out like a waterfall. Ye Chong's vision was tested on a whole new level; should he be even be slightly distracted, he would beat himself up for it when the whole thing was over!

His hands moved quickly across the control panel, casting illusory shadows of movement!

As for Mu, the mech had picked up a strange looking weapon that was laid beside the mech that Ye Chong slipped into.

The weapon was similar to a lance from archaic times, but extended to a whole fifteen meters, and was obviously made for the mech that Ye Chong chose. Like the mech, the weapon's dim blue was like the flowing ocean; the sharp protruding end of the lance had two crescent-shaped blades on its sides, which made the weapon look like an antiquated double bit axe. The crescent blades curved slightly inwards near the tip of the lance, but bent outwards on the other end. The point where the blades meet the lance's central beam was a diamond shaped ruby crystal. The central blade of the lance had a mysterious sheen that seemed to constantly evolve. If an artist were present, he or she would certainly be intrigued!

Mu watched the tip of the lance closely, as though he held great interest in it.

Ji Shangyan furrowed his brows at the mass of confusion before him and could not help but let out a little sigh at the fact that his eldest brother was too caught up in his joy. Immediately after the two mechs were finished, his eldest brother had arranged for a celebration, and even managed to invite almost everyone there, leaving only two behind to guard the place. This was too

ridiculous!

Earlier, he had advised his brother to send a few more guards over, but his brother had impatiently waved him off. The underlings around him may not have said anything, but through his keen perception, Ji Shangyan sensed their shunning towards him, thinking that he was not understanding!

A few days ago, members of the surveillance team for Old Xu were all killed. The perpetrator was still unidentified, and Ji Shangyan had a scolding from his old man for it. While he believed that the perpetrator was someone who had a close relationship with Old Xu, the elder man was a tough nut to crack, and a precious asset that could not afford to be shouted at or physically intimidated. His family's actions against Old Xu had alarmed some higher-ups, and so his old man had asked for him to halt his operations against Old Xu.

"Ah, forget it, it can't be helped!" Ji Shangyan smiled wryly at himself. The people before him had all stayed at this secret base for at least 3 years; now that they had succeeded, how can he deny them their festive mood? Ji Shangyan understood their feelings; against the hostility they showed for him, he could only smile wryly back to himself.

However, there should not be any problems, since the secret base had a state of the art identification system. It would be a fool's errand to attempt to infiltrate the base without raising any alarms. Ji Shangyan could not help but mock his excessive worrying. He believed that no one present would also believe in the possibility of that happening.

The Ji family was famous for photon processors, and also far ahead of any other aristocratic family in matters concerning photon processors.

Besides, Ji Shangyan knew how much time his old man spent on the base, and the importance of the base in the Ji family. Besides,

the project they were celebrating now was monumental! As the second son of the Ji family, Ji Shangyan felt similar pride for this family project.

"Hehe, the Four Aristocratic Families of Fal? They'll all make way for the Ji family!"

Suddenly, the ground shook - everyone present for the celebration froze, and total silence descended on the area!

"Was it an earthquake?" As everyone raised their suspicion.

Earthquakes, the result of violent tectonic shifts, is no longer a natural phenomenon that threatens human safety. Even common building structures can withstand the strong vibrations from earthquakes, much less the exceptionally constructed secret base that housed the current celebration!

The vibrations grew stronger, and seemed to be heading their way. The rumbling undertones gradually became louder and louder.

Whatever was moving did so very quickly - in the blink of an eye, the crowd could sense that it was getting much closer to them. The rumbling sound was getting clearer, and everyone present began to panic.

Ye Chong maneuvered his newly acquired mech, plunging through walls, making its own path through brute force.

Ye Chong was very fond of the mech. The only thing that bothered him was its name - Harmony of the Winter Aria. It sounded weird, of course, but most importantly, the name was too long. For Ye Chong, who appreciated conciseness, the name was a little awkward for him.

Ye Chong had fitted all the weaponry for the Harmony of the Winter Aria. As he sat in the cabin, he marvelled at the mech's specifications. However, this obviously was not the time for a detailed inspection - in forty five seconds, Ye Chong completed

the initial setup, and in another ten seconds, all the weapons intended for the mech and scattered around it were fitted.

In those fifty five seconds, Mu was searching in the secret basement. In only twenty seconds, Mu located his target. The mech took another twenty seconds to crack a safe hidden in a corner. As for identifying his exact objective amongst the other things kept within the safe, Mu took only half a second.

The object seemed to be a mineral ore, as large as two fists. The ore had a strange feel to it - its colour seemed to be constantly evolving, an unrecognisable hue to the human eye. Mu decidedly tossed the ore into his cabin.

Once Ye Chong was done with the initial setup, Mu asked to be returned to his alternate dimension. Ye Chong had no objections to the mech's wishes - his battles are his own!

The most urgent difficulty for Ye Chong now was to find the mech's dimension keystone. Without it, the mech would be incomplete. If he could not keep the mech in its alternate dimension, even if he could escape the base, he would only be easy prey for the entire Ji family.

Ye Chong was not so foolish as to think that he could single-handedly destroy the Ji family.

Finding the Harmony of the Winter Aria's dimension keystone was his top and only priority.

Dimension keystones and their corresponding mechs can interact within a certain distance. Ye Chong skilfully commanded the photon processor, attempting to locate Harmony's dimension keystone. A red dot glared back at him almost immediately on the holographic screen, while another blue dot indicated his location.

Knowing the location of dimension keystone, Ye Chong made his move!

Ye Chong's method was simple - fly straight ahead!

The distance between two points is shortest in a straight line. With the direction decided, Ye Chong wielded the fifteen-meter lance as he broke through wall after wall - sturdy alloy walls, resilient walls, the lot of them - as they all caved in easily under the archaic looking lance of the Harmony of the Winter Aria!

Ye Chong closed his distance with the dimension keystone through this crude and straightforward method.

He had seen no one in his path, and thought it was odd. Since no one had sounded the alarm even as he carelessly destroyed the base, Ye Chong believed it must be Mu who had destroyed the alarm system. As for the extent of Mu's damage to the system, Ye Chong would not have known.

One last wall to go! Even as he was overjoyed with that fact, Ye Chong grew calm.

Ye Chong took in a deep breath, and, with a little hum and some dexterous manipulation of the controls, the Harmony of the Winter Aria abruptly accelerated - the archaic, blue lance swiped left, right and center - as the wall before him crumbled into pieces, debris flying all over the place.

Harmony swiftly broke through the last wall.

As the massive machine made its way through the wall, all those present for the celebration were caught in surprise, staring at the machine - was this not the Harmony of the Winter Aria? In an instant, they all realised what was really happening, and all hell broke loose - screams and loud cries filled the area, as the crowd was thrown into a mass of confusion, scurrying all over the place.

Ye Chong ignored the people, for he had only one objective, which was the Harmony's dimension keystone!

The highly accurate scanning system returned the exact location of the dimension keystone to Ye Chong - it was on a man, currently surrounded by four others. The man was holding a glass of red

wine, staring at him in confusion. The holographic scanner swept through the man's body over and over, such that even the fat around his waist was clearly visible to Ye Chong. The dimension keystone was in his overcoat's left pocket. Ye Chong did not hesitate - he swiped the fifteen-metre lance against his opponents, and the men around his target were pushed out of the way.

Harmony of the Winter Aria lifted the man in the center with its left arm. The sound of shattering glass was heard as the man began to scream.

Everyone present looked fearfully at the eldest young master of the Ji family, threatened by the intruder, but none could save him. They did not even understand how their trusted alarm system was compromised. However, a few of the sharper ones had already left to call for help.

Ji family's eldest young master was lifted by Harmony, 3 meters from the ground. As the pilot's cabin slowly opened up, everyone stared intently at the opening, curious to know the identity of this reckless and fearless trespasser!

A shadow flashed past, a blurred motion that the audience could not make out of, and Harmony of the Winter Aria's pilot cabin closed shut again. Before the crowd could react, the eldest young master was casually tossed aside like a ragged sandbag.

Ye Chong left the red-silverish dimension keystone behind. While he knew that was the keystone for the other red-silver mech that was beside the Harmony, it was apparent that he could not backtrack to retrieve the other mech. Keeping the extra dimension keystone might reveal his location sooner or later.

While he was equally interested in the red-silver mech, it looked that the enemy had arrived!

MPA: Mech Pilot Association

## Chapter 74: A Short Battle

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Johansson received the signal from Ye Chong's F-58 almost instantly. Mechs from Black Cove have a few unique ways of communication; once the distance between two of them is less than 500 kilometers, they would automatically reach out to each other. Cosmic Flare zoomed in on the location of the F-58 rapidly. Had Ye Chong not removed an important photon return circuit earlier under Mu's advice, the duration would have been shorter. However, the signal was fleeting, and Johansson guessed that Number 58 must have withdrawn the mech.

Johansson slipped into the Cosmic Flare hastily. The higher-ups at Black Cove were deeply interested in Number 58 - while he had only spent a short time at Black Cove, his performance during training greatly exceeded the average ability and speed of progress. He was definitely one of the finest mech pilots trained by Black Cove, but most importantly, the Black Cove higher-ups believed that he still had plenty of room for improvement. These factors made for Black Cove's determination to keep him with them.

Black Cove's intelligence network was also extensive, such that they managed to track down Number 58, all the way to Blue Ocean.

He had thought that finding Number 58 would take a long time, but unexpectedly found his target battling against the MPA. He disapprovingly thought of the events, "That white mech was not really that powerful. If Number 58 did not suddenly retreat and distracted me, I would have finished him off!"

Moreover, that Number 58 from Team F had battled against the MPA's Messenger with a training mech - what a foolish act!

Black Cove's orders to Johansson was to bring him back. Of all the people back there, only he and Instructor Hak had seen Number 58's real face. He thought of the way Number 58's eyes glowed with a yearn for power that day, and was certain that once



he could find his target, he would be able to complete his mission. This mission was worth a grand total of fifty Black Cove points - if he could succeed in this mission, his points would be enough for him to receive a higher level of training.

The thought made him excited, his eyes burning with eagerness, and his fists clenched tightly until his joints cracked. "If only, if only I had the strength, then surely I could do it ..."

Johansson felt his heart throb strongly, as though a lithe entered his sight.

After a moment, he sobered up, but the thought of Number 58's retreat disturbed him - could it be that the man was no longer hungry for power?

No matter what, he must not fail! "If Number 58 refused to follow me obediently ... Hehe ..." A look of promised destruction flitted past his face. "Besides, based on the time, it should soon begin!"

The Cosmic Flare flew at close to Mach 7, and reaching the F-58 would not take more than half a minute. If not for the delay in identifying Number 58's location, Johansson would have been standing right before Number 58 right now.

The black Cosmic Flare flew across the night sky like the God of Death. The air current sped past the surface of the mech's black sword and barbs, shrieking terrifyingly!

"It should be here." Johansson scanned the ordinary looking base before him. The photon processor had indicated that Number 5 was right here. The Cosmic Flare floated midair above the base and began to repeatedly scan the area at maximum capacity. However, the F-58's signal was still undetected!

"Has Number 58 entered the inner parts of the base, or has he left?"

Johansson hesitated for a moment before swooping downwards, passing by some mechs along the way. In Black Cove, all mechs

kept a distance between themselves as a precaution against hostility. This has become one of Black Cove's unwritten rules - if you and another person got too close, the other party might mistake your intentions as hostile, and the next thing you know is seeing a fatal blow coming straight at you!

Never let someone get close to you! This is Black Cove's special rule!

However, once outside Black Cove, the rule became somewhat peculiar. Take the residents of Blue Ocean - the number of mechs here were vast, and if one is to fly past the throngs of mechs in the air every day, how can it be possible to maintain a distance with other mechs at all times?

In the seconds that just passed, a few mechs had flew past him closely! The Cosmic Flare's anti-detection is better than the F-58's, and an average mech would not be aware of the mech's existence through its scanning system. If not for Johansson's active evasion, the Cosmic Flare would have crashed into more than a few mechs.

This undoubtedly made Johansson, who had not travelled beyond Black Cove for a long time, very uncomfortable.

Another mech was coming towards him. Based on its trajectory, impact was inevitable. The blue-and-white mech seemed to be of a newer design, and the archaic looking lance in its hand surprised Johansson. Few mechs are equipped with such weapons, and weapons long forgotten in history such as the lance often required special techniques to be effective. Without special techniques, these weapons will be less powerful than weapons like the laser sword and flame sabre.

However, Johansson did not pay it much attention. Upon noticing the unfamiliar mech, he shifted his attention elsewhere and flew a few meters to the side to avoid impact. With the high rate of mech ownership these days, and lack of any substantial restrictions by the government on mech designs, it is not

uncommon to see all sorts of odd mech designs. Johansson had once seen a mech modelled from a millennia-old container used as a toilet. It was rumoured to have a strange name - Potty! The owner of the mech was also said to be a toilet seat hobbyist. However, the unimaginative Johansson had no idea how a quadrupedal ungulate and a roundish toilet seat could be combined. However, the unimaginative Johansson had no idea how a pot could be associated with human excrement!

Compared to that, this blue-and-white mech seemed absolutely normal! "Perhaps the owner of this mech was only an enthusiast of archaic weaponry," thought Johansson.

Johansson was completely absorbed by the blue-and-white mech's archaic looking lance to notice that the mech was actually flying much faster than an average mech. However, even if he did notice it, he would probably not give it much thought, since the Cosmic Flare was incredibly fast!

The other party did not seem to notice his presence, as it did not move strangely. Johansson was already focusing entirely on the photon processor's various scan results, looking desperately for the F-58.

Everything seemed to proceed the same, as every time he had to evade the mechs that failed to detect the Cosmic Flare.

The blue-and-white mech's speed did not change, flying at high speed towards Johansson. However, Johansson's earlier maneuver a few meters to the side avoided the possibility of impact under normal circumstances!

The two mechs closed in, and the blue-and-white mech's archaic lance seemed to have adjusted slightly in the mech's grip, like an unintentional movement. Johansson was still focused on the photon processor's scans.

As the distance between the two mechs reduced to less than a hundred meters, Johansson finally shifted his attention to the

other mech. Of course, he was only preventing an accident from happening, however slight the chance was.

As he inadvertently scanned the approaching mech, Johansson suddenly had a little premonition, and felt that something was off. However, he could not make much out of it, only that it made him extremely uncomfortable, even though everything seemed to be normal!

The hundred-meter range took less than a second to cover for the mechs travelling beyond Mach 5.

The two mechs were about to pass by each other, seemingly without incident!

Abruptly, a chilling gleam closed in on Johansson. Almost simultaneously, the Cosmic Flare's alarm for attacks roared to life! Johansson had his soul rocked to its core, as he reflexively lifted his left hand to block the attack with his plasma shield and retreated backwards at the same time!

Too fast!

That was Johansson's only thought!

The Cosmic Flare's plasma shield was only half lifted before the gleaming tip of the archaic lance breached past his mech's left arm!

The Cosmic Flare was determinedly retreating, but switching the engines from the original floating mode to maximum speed required a finite time span. While the Cosmic Flare could still manage this quickly and negligibly under normal circumstances, the millisecond delay was fatal in the current encounter!

The dampened sound of a mech being punctured through was unfamiliar - the strong sense of splitting apart put Johansson's mind to a halt, and immediately engulfed him completely in pain, almost suffocating him. Ironically, the pause in thought gave him a short window of extreme clarity!

A nimble figure flitted through his mind, getting clearer and

clearer. He could not help but reach out with his bloody hands, wishing to embrace the figure that was all the dreams that he had worked hard for all this time! Fatigued gradually overcame him, as he coughed out blood from his mouth. His outreaching hands were getting heavier and heavier, and slowly, that unforgettable figure began to dissolve into a mist, as his vitality gradually dimmed, and vanished!

At the base's defense center, someone was seen running hastily towards it. Before he even cleared the security room, the person shouted with panic, "Bad news, bad news, someone's infiltrated the base ..."

The defense center's inhabitants exchanged looks amongst themselves, and began to laugh.

One of them, the leader, grinned. "Old Li, that's such a lame joke, someone infiltrated the base? Ha ..."

Old Li continued anxiously, "Eh, it's for real this time, someone really infiltrated the base, even ..."

Another one of them laughed, interrupting him, and spoke in a mocking tone, "Oh, it's for real this time!" He even emphasised on the "this time" and, coupled with his silly expression, invited another round of laughter from the rest of his coworkers!

Old Li was blushing from his nerves. "It's true ... It's ..."

One of the kinder members could not stand to see Old Li in such distress, and spoke up, "Ah, Old Li, your joke really wasn't top notch, you see, our security systems are doing fine, absolutely normal! If someone infiltrated the base, would it be so quiet on our side? Hoho, even if you don't trust us, surely you trust the Ji family's photon processor security system?"

The same person dragged Old Li by the arm, ready to send him out, and to get him out of his predicament.

Suddenly, a massive explosion was heard, and everyone froze!

Ye Chong satisfyingly watched as Johansson's mech exploded right before his eyes. Under such circumstances, the probability of the mech's pilot surviving was almost certainly zero!

With Johansson no more, and the base still ignorant of him, Ye Chong immediately thought of the red-and-silver mech at the lowest level of the basement!

# Chapter 75: Shang and the Do Kun Stone

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The chaotic sight of the base made Ye Chong give up the enticing idea, and took off into the night with the Harmony of the Winter Aria.

Ye Chong did not disturb Grandpa Qian's sleep as he tiptoed back to his room. The civilian locks used in the house were a piece of cake for Mu, who could access the Ji family's base easily. Ye Chong was only taking advantage of the mech's abilities!

Once back home, Ye Chong deployed the Harmony of the Winter Aria and was all over the mech, poking here and there, entirely fascinated with it!

Harmony of the Winter Aria!

Ye Chong had increased the height of the ceiling for Mu some time back - if it was not for this, Harmony would have had to crouch in the room to avoid going through the roof, for it was 12 meters tall! The dim blue and ivory white alternating hues had a strong modern technological feel to it, a masterful combination between science and art! The four double-folded wings on the back were like the wings of a large bird, enabling a more stable and easier flight in the atmosphere. The nifty double-folded design meant that the four broad wings only occupied a small space. The edges of the wings shone like the edge of a knife, and one can imagine the effects of impact from the mech's speedy flight - even slight contact with the wings could split flesh and bones.

The usually calm and quiet Ye Chong was mightily excited by Harmony's accessories - his expression bloomed like a flower, surprising Mu!

The plasma shield on its left arm could easily deflect pure energy-based attacks such as from lasers and heat rays. For short-ranged mechs, this was the most basic measure against long-ranged attack models. Harmony also had a laser sword. While a laser sword is a

formidable weapon, it was also highly energy consuming. Thus, the effectiveness of the sword is linearly dependent on the capacity of the weapon's energy cells. The energy cells for the laser sword of the Harmony could last for six hours under maximum capacity of attack!

The laser sword may be formidable, but it was not the Harmony of the Winter Aria's main weapon!

Blue Winter was the name of the archaic lance provided by the photon processor. However, Ye Chong was not particularly interested in the weapon. While he was slightly intrigued by the material of the weapon, its other features did not appeal to him. An archaic lance? A UF magnetic sword [1] would be far more practical. After all, he had never learned how to use an archaic lance! However, the lance was very sharp - it can even penetrate the armour of Black Cove's war mech!

The two auto lock-on double-edged shurikens were Ye Chong's favourite. Their speed could go up to Mach 10, and were designed much like the magnetic sword. Ye Chong could imagine the effects of hitting the target with their high rotational speed - the enemy's mech would fly off in pieces. The wounds left behind would be neither clean nor neat; instead, they would be irregular holes. With the addition of the micro photon processor equipped within, enabling its auto target lock-on mechanism, the weapon can well function on its own after deployment.

The Ji family was famous for their photon processors, and the Harmony of the Winter Aria's photon processor was of an exceptional standard. However, the massive amount of information involved demanded a certain level of expertise from its pilot.

The Harmony of the Winter Aria was also equipped with hummingbird detection devices - up to 5 mechanical hummingbirds could be released into the air, and the maximum scanning radius could reach up to 160.6 kilometers.



Ye Chong could not help but gasp in admiration, "Mu, this mech is amazing! Ah, is this why you brought me there? How did you know there was such a mech there? Ah, too bad about the red-silver mech, if only I could bring it back somehow. That mech is probably as good as this one!" He was fine with not having the red-silver mech to himself, but the thought of not damaging the mech before leaving filled him with regret!

Mu was silent throughout their journey home.

Mu spoke with great sympathy, "Poor Ye, as expected, you still fall within the 9 percent probability of not guessing the state of affairs correctly. However, based on your intelligence, this is but a very common situation!"

Mu's human-like and odd tone surprised Ye Chong, and he immediately realised what was happening. "You're not Mu! You're that ..."

Mu spoke in amazement, "Not bad, Ye. That's right, I'm Shang! From now on, he's called Mu, and I'm called Shang! This is the result of our communication. While I was initially weaker than him by 8 to 11.5 percent, but this difference in strength is gradually narrowing. Now, I am only 5 percent weaker than him, he can no longer suppress me. Of course, the same goes for me, and so we have reached an agreement for each other's names and schedule of taking over this mech's consciousness."

"He is stronger than me," Shang spoke without reserve, "that is without question. His period of taking over should be longer than mine. Based on our calculations, his period will be longer than mine by a tenth. We had decided on ten days as a cycle, which means that starting today, I will be taking over the mech for ten days, and after that, Mu will take over. Of course, his period will be eleven days."

Ye Chong gaped at the mech, as though he had heard a most unbelievable story.

Shang was indifferent. "No need to be so shocked, our understanding of each other is much more than your understanding of us. It is only natural for us to reach this agreement!"

Ye Chong thought of Mu's words from before, and found that Shang and him were actually not much different, and would not do him harm.

Shang seemed to read his thoughts. "Don't worry, Mu and I use the same information database, there's no need to fret over this matter. The only difference between Mu and I is our performance. Mu is better at calculations, while my forte is emotion analysis. As for other aspects, we are identical, including all matters related to you!"

Shang's long string of words made Ye Chong felt very, very uncomfortable!

Ye Chong asked, "Shang, you just said I guessed wrong. Could it be that Mu did not go to the base for this mech?"

Shang replied lazily, "Of course not. While the Harmony of the Winter Aria's performance is not bad, it is only slightly better than the white mech and Black Cove's war mech, and still too limited. It has a fine name, but why would Mu risk you for this mech? His objective is this!" Shang produced the ore found at the very bottom of the basement. Back then, Ye Chong was anxiously making the initial settings for the Harmony and did not notice Mu's actions.

Ye Chong held the ore in his hands, curious at the rock about twice the size of his fist.

The colours changed constantly, glimmering like moving liquid, and none could fail to notice the curiosity. It felt heavy and a little warm in his palms, its smooth surface like the skin of a young lady, soothing to the touch. At least, that was how Shang described it. Making Ye Chong understand a young lady's skin would be harder than producing two PSI [2] in the same photon processor.

"What is this thing?" Ye Chong asked, intrigued.

"The Do Kun stone, academically known as Platini. Its composition is complicated, no one has been able to work out its exact constituents till today. Of course, the main reason for that is that it is extremely rare! It has rather unique properties, and while the material's own physical properties are not that outstanding, it is uniquely suited as an enhancer. With just a little of the Do Kun stone mixed into an alloy, the alloy material's properties can be greatly enhanced!"

Ye Chong listened intently. Whether it was the Do Kun stone or Platini ore, he had only heard of them for the first time today.

"The tip of Harmony's archaic lance was made with a little Do Kun stone mixed in. If not for that, you would not have penetrated the armour of the Black Cove war mech. Today, the lance can breach the armour of more than 95 percent of the mechs out there in the world! And the Harmony of the Winter Aria's advantage over the Black Cove war mech is due to this archaic lance, because its tip has some Do Kun stone mixed in!"

Ye Chong did not imagine that the archaic lance that he easily dismissed was the quintessence of the Harmony of the Winter Aria!

Shang spoke sarcastically, "Too bad none in the Ji family recognised the Do Kun stone, or they would not have carelessly stored this precious material in the basement. Besides, the amount of Do Kun stone in the lance was too far off the mark from the ideal material proportion, what a monumental waste!"

Ye Chong could not help but asked, "So this Do Kun stone is that amazing?"

"As far as I know, there's more it can achieve!"

"The Do Kun stone also has a property known to very few!" Shang paused at that, as if teasing Ye Chong.

Ye Chong was thoroughly absorbed, and asked, "What property?"

Seeing that he had achieved the goal of hooking Ye Chong's interest, Shang did not delay his explanation any further, "The Do Kun stone's most astonishing property is its capacity for self regeneration. Self generation is a fundamental capacity of all living organisms, and for the Do Kun stone as well, but the latter is not a living organism! Of course, its self generating process is far slower than that of the living organisms, its mass increasing by only about 2.3064 percent over a century."

Ye Chong was unimpressed. "Ah, that's not very useful, only 2 percent for every hundred years is way too slow!"

"Self generation is naturally slow, but if you artificially cultivate it, its rate of generation can be significantly increased! Up to a most impressive level! You should know that the Do Kun stone is definitely one of the top five most precious minerals, even a grain of the material is worth a good many gold zuan! I have no idea how the Ji family obtained such a large piece of Do Kun stone, their ignorance is a pity and a blessing for us!" Shang spoke with a hint of sarcasm.

"Gold zuan? Not interested!" Ye Chong was deflated and a little disappointed.

Shang knew exactly what would entice Ye Chong, and tossed the carrot. "As far as I know, up till now, the best performing mechs have their armour mixed in with Do Kun stone. Hehe, there's also some black gold mixed in. Against this alloy material, no mech, not even the Black Cove's or the MPA's white mech, can stand against it!"

"Really?" Ye Chong was pleasantly surprised.

# Chapter 76: The Alchemist

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The little tail of the devil wagged on mischievously, "Such alloy is amazingly strong against physical attacks. It also has an outstanding immunity towards beam-based weaponry." The devil carried on tempting his master into this, "The best part is none other than its density, which is astonishingly  $\frac{1}{3}$  the mass of the lightest alloys currently known for mech-productions. You could easily imagine the terrifying speed it could achieve even with a normal engine from the supermarket."

Ye Chong was triggered, triggered hard. The desire lustered in his eyes became stronger and stronger.

As long as it was something related to machines or mech specifically, Ye Chong would be wholeheartedly attracted.

"I could conclude that this alloy is the most wonderful choice that would have ever existed in the fantasy for mech-productions. Ye, think about it, if you were to make a mech out of this, who knows... Zzt! Zzzt!" Shang tried to voice exclamation through his mechanical beeps which sounded really bizarre to ears.

Ye Chong did not notice the distorted voice-acting from his partner as his mind was all on that illusionary material before him. If all goes exactly as what Shang had mentioned, that would be lovely!

Wait...

He pinched himself back to the reality, "So Shang, do you happen to know the formula for this alloy?"

"Well of course." Shang was proud, "I was unable to identify the source of this formula, but it seems to have existed in the database a long time ago..." His tone sounded confused. "Still most of the data in the folder is badly damaged. Mu and I had tried methods of different kinds for recovery yet it seemed damaged beyond repair."

He halted for ponders, "However... practically speaking, such amount of Do Kun Stones is insufficient to build a mech," he added.

Ye Chong stared at the Do Kun Stone of the size of his fists, as he imagined the mech of height about 10 meters. He has a point. Ye Chong nodded approvingly. He knows metallurgy better than me. I only know about mech machineries. If he says so, then so be it!

He remembered something Shang had stated before, "Shang, did you say that the stones can be cultivated? By using artificial settings to stimulate its growth?"

Shang's mechanical eyes blinked, "Yes, that is correct. But regarding the exact input for that setting is currently unknown for that part of the data has been destroyed. I only know the fact that Do Kun Stones could be cultivated using a specific kind of methodology. A preset they call it."

"Preset?" It was the first time Ye Chong heard of this term.

Ye Chong seemed pretty intrigued and that excited Shang as he finally got the boy's interests on the outside world, "A preset is the jargon used among the chemists. It is not surprising that you are unaware of such term."

"Chemists?" Ye Chong was more confused; seemingly this happened to be another of those classes or occupations he had never heard before.

"Or Alchemist some called it. Ye!" Shang's turned serious in his tone, "There are all sorts of occupations in this world. It was never only the Pilot that matters. You know, there are much, much, much more fun out there than being a pilot for a robot like me. If you held interests on nothing than the mechs, then you are missing out a lot!"

Ye Chong was astounded.

He looked at Shang, "When the heck did you become such a

nagging kind? Oh wait, the non-nagging kind was Mu, since he lectures but he doesn't nag. So Shang, are you the nagging kind for real? I don't like the habit of nagging you know. You might be right of what you've said, but to me, mech is my ultimate interest and being a pilot for a robot like you is the prime joy to my world!"

Man, Mu and Shang sure do not just differ by their names.

"Kaffzzzt! Kaffzzt!" Shang tried synthesizing a sound of cough as he hesitated his response to Ye Chong's statement. He held up and went silent for a moment. He decided to ignore what Ye Chong had just said, "So, technically, a chemist is the one who cultivates the designated quality or quantity of crops using his or her supreme control over the growth conditions of the said lifeform. It involves biology, developmental biology, chemistry and other scientific studies." It would be better for him to cut the nag and carry on with the lecture, "For instance, we have chemists for spices. They mix some of the cultured solution extracted from the plants of the known spices to obtain spices of a more vibrant or extraordinary flavor. The spices they cultivated would be of high quality and there won't be side-effects from consumption. So they are much more expensive than the chemical food-flavoring you see in the market." By then Shang believed that Ye Chong would actually consider being an alchemist, "There are also chemists for herbs and food. Most of the consumable products have an alchemist behind the scene; they are very popular among the people, not only because of their premium products, but also..."

Shang's detailed introduction stopped abruptly.

"But also...?" bewildered Ye Chong, as he asked.

Shang's white noises of beeping rang for a while. He thought it through and assumed the following statement would not give Ye Chong effects by any degree, "But also... they are mostly women."

Women? Ye Chong snorted. So what if they are all women? What has it to do with me?

Seeing how Ye Chong reacting to his line indifferently, his mechanical voice produced a sigh of relief. It still sounded like distortion though. It was very weird to the ears.

...

...

"Um..." Ye Chong went on with something else, "About this Harmony, I still need some time to get used to it, or it would be too passive for me to react if there was something going on." The nature's law of survival had been imprinted inside Ye Chong's mind. Adaptability would be his major concern at anytime, anywhere! He had an absolute confidence of his strength, yet he refused to be lighthearted in the outside world.

He believed that any place could be a war field and he would be dead for sure if he were to relax for even a millisecond in it. The years on Trash Planet-12 taught him alertness, which did not seem really necessary for his current tranquil daily life however.

Fortunately Shang did not overheat from his women talk, "Mhm." He nodded, "Yes, that would be much more important. Let's see. According to my calculation, in about 3 days time, you should be able to know almost everything on this mech. Even though this mech has an underdeveloped appearance, I would suggest you to stick to it for now. The only useful part of this would be the antique firearm I presume, though you can't master its use at this point for sure. Mu had already started simulating and calculating the optimum method to use this firearm. So probably by the next time he shows up, he could give you some advice, since dumping the only good weapon you could have would be a big waste."

Ye Chong was overjoyed. He was glad that Mu was doing the calculation for him while he was stuck thinking of a way to use this firearm. Mu... thanks... He was a little touched by his gesture.

The north of the Jesha zone was a barren - utterly barren land. It



was harsh. It was deserted after the illegal logging activities by the pioneers at the Blue Ocean planet back then. Since lumbers from an actual natural forest were overpriced in the market, they were willing to destroy the entire habitat to get an exorbitant profit. Eventually this land was murdered like the other lands. But this was one of the worst devastations among them.

The place was absolutely deserted within tens of thousands kilometer of range. It spent half of the days in heavy sandstorm where one could see nothing as if in total darkness. One's life could be endangered even when one travelled here in a sturdy mech as location services would be unusable almost all the time. If the location services were unavailable to begin with, one could lose the way out and would struggle being blinded by the sandstorm, draining the battery bit by bit as they ran around like mice in a maze. Eventually, they would die due to hunger, fatigue, thirst, whatever cause of death you could name in a desert.

Such a place obviously forbade any form of access, especially explorers on mechs.

And in that sandstorm, oh my gosh, there was actually silhouette of a mech!

Ye Chong piloted the Harmony of Winter Aria with caution. Its fairness was tainted by the veils of dust as it inched towards the storm clumsily. The sandstorm would unquestionably hinder the overall performance of a pilot, thus most pilots would keep themselves away from here. However, if one were to travel through this sandstorm, the Harmony would be the model with the best accuracy. That was Shang's suggestion after evaluating various aspects on Harmony of Winter Aria. "It should be good enough," he commented as he dragged Ye Chong all the way here for vigorous training.

It might sounded a bit absurd but Ye Chong eventually agreed to Shang's theory.

There was something unique about it.

Harmony accelerated and made a sharp turn. It drew her laser sword and charged up dramatically. The glaring light wielded like a pale yellow halo in the storm. Slash! The sandstorm was cut through. The plasma shield on its left arm shifted stance as it toddled quickly with her body tilting left and right. The laser sword struck swiftly like a serpent when Harmony strangely slid to the side. Its giant body stood in the flow of the storm. A pair of homing blades crossed out the golden cloak of dirt like lightning. An amazing sight it was! They flew back to Harmony's hands like swallows to the nest afterwards.

The input was executed in perfection. It was seamless and unaffected by the weather.

Ye Chong was satisfied as he saw the happening from the cabin. He would not need that antique firearm even if he were to face an expert like Johansson. The blades would be more than enough.

Kekeke. Shang was proud too when he saw his theory working out after all.

It was a step towards the victory. Nevertheless when Ye Chong exited the area, the Harmony of Winter Aria had lost its former gorgeousness as it was wrecked by the storm. Piled in dust, it just looked like a splat of mud from afar. That was uncalled for. Ye Chong's eyes went wide like a saucer after climbing out of the cabin. He laughed bitterly. Looks like we have more work to do!

Well at least the goal of the training had been flawlessly accomplished! Ye Chong had mastered the control of the Harmony, which was a big relief to him.

...

"So regarding chemist, I think I could brief you a little," said Shang kindly on the way home.

Yeah. "Brief." That's what he thought. Not me!

Biology? Developmental Biology? Chemistry? Microbiology? Why is physics involved? Hey, hey, hey! Shang what's with the huge board? What are you writing? Hold up... Hey!

Ye Chong was having a headache with Shang's so-called briefing. The holograms of information literally drowned Ye Chong with Shang's voice. He tried to stand still, but the lecture was harsher than the storm. His head rumbled and he fell.

Uggggggghhh...

Oh no! Ye Chong could not hold it any longer! He was moaning in pain!

"So when you try to combine this formula with that, yes, applying this onto the given diagram, assuming we are doing under this condition, substituting the equation with the other theoretical calculations, you'll get... Ye? Ye? Hello?"

The symbols... the alien languages, the scribbles... the graph, the pie chart, the diagram, what? There are also formulae?

It was super effective! Ye Chong fainted!

"Ye... Ye my boy, someone's looking for you!" Grandpa Qian's voice rang like a revelation.

Ye Chong sprung out of Shang's cabin and rushed to the front desk. He would not want to spend any extra second with those horrible things in the cabin. It was too much!

Yang An and Ding Yining were the ones who saved Ye Chong's life. Yang An skipped the formalities as he sat down, stating the motive of his visit this time. Apparently the academy's own pilot tournament would start in a few days. So they hoped Ye Chong would be well-prepared and it would be best if Ye Chong could be more cooperative with Yining's operations in the next few days. Regarding the pay... well it was never a matter to start with.

What a good opportunity! What a good escape plan! While Ye Chong was figuring out a proper excuse to stay away from Shang's

ultimate chemist training program, these two had came! "Yes! Yes! No problem! Certainly!" He nodded his head forcefully and followed Yining home right after. He ran into the storage and asked to begin right away. Ye Chong peeked through the curtains and looked around. Phew! He was safe. And with pleasure, they launched their operations. Ye Chong was very cooperative, as what he had promised Yang An. Yang An was of course impressed by Ye Chong's initiatives, though Ye Chong did not seem to care about this guy at the slightest bit.

Yining was the kind of maniac who would go wild once his hands reached the cogs. It was no doubt that he made the impeccable combination with Ye Chong who had strong interests in mechs too. Ye Chong never had the chance to realize his hobby till he met Yining and his friends. Now he had tons of toys to mess with. He felt like the happiest man on Blue Ocean planet, especially knowing that he could avoid Shang's chemist courses completely.

One of them recommended the theory to support the design while the other put the theory into hands. During the process, Ye Chong also sought Yining's teaching on using these fancy gadgets in his storage and Yining was not shy to bring up all sorts of questions that had been bothering him for long to Ye Chong. They grew on each other. The night was bland. It was only about two men, one interest and a bunch of tools and gears in the house.

Three more days till the tournament...

## Chapter 77: What's a Beauty?

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It was daybreak. Ye Chong woke up from his bed as he recalled the happiest night before, where he and Yining had a long session of conference till late-night. The hands-on experience was great and he had familiarized himself with some common gadgets under Yining's guidance. He had nailed a fair control of strength output, with precision the apparatuses danced in his hands as he drifted through the parts. Such efficiency was also because of the vast theoretical knowledge he had learned from his adventure, which appeared to be rather striking to Yining as he watched. "Such a talent!" he exclaimed in envy. Of course, after being thoroughly tortured by the elders at Aurora back then, Ye Chong's assumed A to Z in his mind was more than advanced to a school boy like Yining. He expressed deep admiration towards Ye Chong's command in mechs. And he believed he would punch anyone who would dare to criticize Ye Chong being uneducated! If there was one that is...

Ye Chong started his day off early, simply because the to-do list for the day was long. He had to knead dough - tons of them - as he planned to have the noodles readied beforehand. "That was my idea!" Shang calculated an estimated timing based on the fermentation pattern to let the noodles set so they would taste the same as freshly kneaded ones while Ye Chong could buy himself more time. The pattern was generalized. "There was a theory somewhere," added Shang as Ye Chong pounded the dough. Well, only Shang could be this bored to carry out standard research from problem statement, hypothesis and all the way to the conclusion. Mu would never bother doing these. Ye Chong smiled. The hypothesized Shang's theory of early-kneading-equals-immediate-kneading still requires a test. So Ye Chong did as what Shang suggested and it actually worked! "It has to work. Kekekekeke!" and Shang's beeping chuckles resounded the whole day.

Mu and Shang sure aren't even from the same family. I could tell. Thought Ye Chong.

I finally understood why Shang claimed that he had a more active mood matrix than Mu. In comparison with Mu, Shang is more humanized, more human-liked practically, though he was much weirder... But Ye Chong got used to it after spending some time with Shang, especially when he treated both of them as ... partners? Friends? Brother. Hmm, yeah, brother! Regarding what would the difference of a brother and a friend, Ye Chong who lacked the experience to it was rather puzzled. "Still, who cares? There's not much of a need to draw lines between everything!" he nodded.

Mu once stated that Shang had existed in the mech way back. Thus, he should be the former ruler of this mech. However, Shang had lost most of the data and the remaining data was unreadable, which made Mu's statement unjustifiable.

What kind of a person Shang was before this?

He wondered.

After pummeling enough noodles for the day, he put them in sequence according to the time he made them. Regarding this he had also informed Grandpa Qian the day before. As long as he took the noodles out in accordance with the sequence, the customers would hardly taste a difference. Grandpa Qian was too delighted hearing about Ye Chong's outing for the day. "Youngsters should always step out of their comfort zone, explore and conquer. Just leave. Don't waste your time hogging the shop for an elderly like me," he said.

After his daily task had ended, he worked out a little. He had hit his limits again. It seemed like he would not make another breakthrough and grow further unless a new training method could be found.

Ye Chong waved his right arm. He was astonished! The shape of his arm did not look as bulky as before. Oh no, could it be a degeneration of muscles? Apparently if he was not making any improvement, he would regress instead. It seems like the daily training program could not be ignored. I should keep my body at its best everyday. He thought to himself and quickly sat down to work out.

He repented for neglecting his body while waiting for Yang An and his friends at the entrance of the shop.

And here they came! Ke Han was looking good. It looked like he had an immense fun piloting Gliding Joy designed by Ye Chong. His gestures conveyed high level of confidence as he stated that his hand-on experience with mech speeding had profoundly improved. "Can't help it. Our team just so happened to pick an anomaly of mechanics from nowhere to do the modification. Hehehehe!" he snickered. "Our luck is quite an anomaly too!"

"Not Ye Chong's," said Yang An as he took a glance at what Ye Chong was wearing. He frowned slightly. It was not even an outfit to begin with. He wanted to point that out but ... thinking about their relationship, he held his fire. Technically what Ye Chong dressed in was one of the old clothes "donated" by Grandpa Qian. And those were some of the oldest threads one could find on the planet. Seeing that kind of clothing Ye Chong was in with that cold face of his, any boys and girls, men and women could just run away. However, Ye Chong did not seem to be aware of such issue of his appearance. He was only aware of whether his clothing would affect any of his intensive movements, like fighting an alien from outer space barehanded for example, which he would have cared if the clothing was restricting his action.

Xuelin among the group took a disdainful look and sighed as she turned her head away. Poor Xiu her cousin gently pulled Xuelin's sleeve a few times, pleading her to stop acting mean and be kind. "Um... Ye." She spoke softly to Ye Chong, "I think... your... your

clothing doesn't ... doesn't seem right. Ho-How about we get you to Xuelin's place to g-get you some... some other clothes? I think uncle sh-should have a more fitting outfit for you. Could you... please... ch-ch-change it?"

What's wrong with my outfit? Ye Chong was bewildered. He lifted his arms, then his legs, his shoulders, lastly his knees. All seems fine, they aren't blocking my movements. "It's okay." He flatly rejected the offer.

"Yeah, like pouring your kindness into the drain would totally work. Xiu, let him be!" Xuelin snorted once more.

Towards Xuelin's ill-mannered statement, Ye Chong reacted with indifference, as if he never heard Xuelin's words. Well, strictly speaking, he did fail to hear her because Shang suddenly got into his head out of nowhere.

"Ye! Ye! Jajajajajaja!" Shang got all excited, "Man! That's some beauties you know there! How could you not mention this to me? Tsk, tsk, tsk. Mu is such an unromantic intelligence without sentiments for ladies. How could he never think of scanning these beauties from 360 degrees and keep them as 3D holograms securely in all eternity at our database? What a waste to the natural resources! Look at them, Ye! They are gorgeous! They are beautiful! They are magnifique! Schön! Especially that lass with the long hair. Hey, Ye Chong!" His voice became serious, "How about you get the girl? Mr. Ye Chong."

"Get the... what?" Ye Chong was on the other frequency.

"Get the girl! G-i-r-l!" Shang's engine had been initiated, charging up, "Yes, go after her! Get to her and give me your best pickup line! Then..." and he laughed lustfully.

"Go after her?" Ye Chong did not understand, "You mean we hunt her down? Why would I want to hunt her down? How do I even go after her when she's not even running? Also, do we use cannons if we were to go after her? But we don't have a cannon right now.



Hmm, though we could produce one with modification. But why? She does not seem to threaten our lives in any form. You mean I, myself? You aren't involved? That doesn't make sense! Mu told me not to simply commit a murder without a proper motive. And we need to do it in stealth!" He lifted his head and glared at Xiu, "If you personally identified some threats from her, it would be the best if we do it at night." His sight was cold, bloodthirsty indeed, scaring Xiu who ran like a little lamb and hiding underneath Xuelin's dress.

Shang's previous libidinous laughter got choked up out of sudden, as if Ye Chong's statement strangled him, "Ye... Ye... Don't tell me... You could kill, even if it was a beauty like this."

"Well..." Ye Chong nonchalantly replied, "It all depends on whether she's threatening to us in the first place. What has it to do with her being a beauty? Also..."

Ye Chong sincerely asked.

"What's a beauty?"

This was breathtaking. No! It was groundbreaking! Shang shrieked in his mind.

"Oh! My! Gosh!" Shang screamed, "What had that damned Mu done to you? How could he teach an innocent boy like you to be a sadistic man in a relationship? No, it's no longer a man. It's a beast! Oh my Fal galaxy! Ye, at this rate, your future would be very dark! Beauty? How could you not know what a beauty is? Ye, you have one job! One job!! If you don't accomplish it, you are ruined, forever!"

He grieved, sighed, gasped and stayed quiet. If he was on screen, he should be looking at the sky, asking why the sky was so high.

"Anyway, a beauty means a beautiful woman," Shang explained out of salvation for the poor boy.

"Beautiful? How do we identify if they are beautiful?" Ye Chong

asked.

And that was another trigger to kindle Shang's hopelessness. He beeped, "Beauties are some of the fairest ladies of them all. Their expressions are always priceless, a scenery to behold, whether they got mad at you, they laugh with you, they grew on you or they were hurt by you. It is never about their faces that defines beauty. It is about their charm." The life lesson had started again as Shang went on passionately, "The captivity in their eyes. Oh, their expressive eyes with fervor rolling like a fire, it's enchanting. Also, they shouldn't look too perfect. Flawless women aren't the fairest. They should have something broken somewhere in their heart. That would be the ultimate soft spot for men, the pole to salute upon. Tsk, tsk, tsk, the lasses before you aren't the fairest, but they would be in a few years. Hahahaha!" he burst out laughing salaciously again.

"I can't compute this," Ye Chong shook his head.

Ugh! Shang's chuckle got interrupted another time. He stayed speechless for some time, pondering how to explain it in Ye Chong's language. Aha! It took him awhile to spit this out, "As long as you feel easy to look at her the whole time." How about that? That's the simplest I could think of.

"Then they aren't even beauties to begin with," stated Ye Chong unconcernedly.

"Oh?" Shang was intrigued, "Does that mean you have a higher standard on ladies? So tell me, Ye. What's considered a beauty in your mind?"

He thought for a while and gradually he spat his description, "They shouldn't be too buffed. That would affect their action speed. But they can't be too slender too. The muscles should be there for explosive performance. Hmm, they should last long in the field too. They must also be flexible, master in combats and have competent knowledge and skills in mech. They should not be

weaker than me and they should be a decisive fighter who launches strike immediately. Better if they could do a one hit K.O. They have to be alert. It would be best if they also happened to be an ace in mech piloting. So... generally speaking, the girls in front of me do not fulfill any of my requirements. So they aren't beauties. Don't try to argue with me on Xuelin's mech skills; those aren't even skillful for starters," concluded Ye Chong his insights.

...

... ..

"Shang?"

Shang was utterly stupefied!

It took him a few seconds to make an appropriate response. Moaned, he spoke on, "Holy Fal Galaxy! Ye, you are a monster! You want the girls to race with you? Do you think all women in this world could hack as good as you? Master in combats? You want to have a one-on-one with her...?"

"Yeah, why not?"

If there was a screen, Shang should be palming his face. He nearly fainted hearing Ye Chong's assurance. "One-on-one. I knew it! Decisive fighter, able to strike a one-hit K.O., don't you fear she would kill you accidentally?"

"As long as I'm more alert whenever I deal with her, it should not happen," Ye Chong replied calmly.

"What if one day you aren't alert enough to prevent that from happening?" Shang asked on as he could not give up just yet!

"Nope. I would stay alert enough all the time. Till the day I die. If I could not stay alert enough, isn't normal for me to die too?" the answer came flatly as Ye Chong muttered in his mind.

That reply almost brought tears to Shang's mechanical eyes, "I guess so! Ye! Gosh! You are just a freak you know that?"

"Freak?" Ye Chong was confused. "What's a freak?"

It was pretty impressive that Shang had yet gone short-circuit from the conversation he had with Ye Chong. He was about to reply Ye Chong when Yang An suddenly howled.

Ye Chong's mind came back to reality. He found Yang An's face all pale as he shut down his communication device. Everyone looked at him in dismay. He inhaled deeply, collected his thoughts and tried to reproduce what he heard. "Ning's parents said Ning was attacked last night when he was out for some grocery!"

"What?!" exclaimed everyone at once, except for Ye Chong.

"Is he okay? How's the injury?" Xuelin asked.

"It shouldn't be an issue." Yang An shook his head, "But he has to take a break for the next few days; he's not gonna make it for the tournament today..."

"Dammit!" Ke Han jumped and stomped the ground angrily, almost rampaging, "It has to be Jeb Luo that rat! That dirty rat! Damn! I saw Green-Head and those twerps loitering at Ning's place! Hell it has to be them! I'll break their legs!" Ke Han pulled his sleeves and stampeded his way out. "Wait!" Yang An grabbed Ke Han hurriedly. It was supposed to be him stopping Ke Han, however Ke Han's strength was obviously of another level to Yang An. Eventually Yang An got dragged away instead. Xuelin ran over to help holding back the thrashing bull. It took them quite some work to settle him down.

Meanwhile Ye Chong was criticizing on how the attack was pointless. Hmph, fools! Nobody flashed their intent to attack this early! What a failure!

They tried calming down, but they really could not. Without Ding Lining and with Ye Chong alone, their victory seemed far-fetched. Nevertheless, it was also far-fetched to find someone who held mechanical skills as good as Yining to replace him. They had

witnessed how Yining materialized Ye Chong's ideas these few days. Yining could not be replaced! He was more important than anyone else.

But now Yining is down, what should we do?

Time passed slowly and yet they were in such a hurry, except for Ye Chong, who assumed himself as an employee to this team. These were not of his concern.

As they realized they did not have much time left, Yang An bit his teeth, asking, "Ye, is it possible that you could complete this modification with Ning's assistance?"

"Hmmm..." He thought for a moment and said, "The possibility is about 80%." Wondered if he was affected by Mu, as he started to express most of the things in figures.

"That's more than enough!" Yang An was delighted. "Then, would you please?"

"I haven't done it yet." Ye Chong spoke on, "It's possible. But I charge extra for that. 2500 Zuan per hour!"

"That is daylight robbery!" Xuelin rushed to him, "You! You! You dirty robber! Do you know what you are doing?"

Ye Chong was puzzled by her reaction. He asked in his mind, "So Shang, what's wrong if I charge more for the extra work that I do?" Shang was still in the shock from their conversation before, he laboriously replied, "Nothing. Nothing's wrong with that."

He raised his brows and ignored Xuelin who was knotting her brows and titling her lips. His eyes were fixed on Yang An.

"Fine!" Yang An ground his teeth and replied, "Deal!"

# Chapter 78: Last One Standing

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Ye Chong was shifting to the venue with the rest of the members. Xuelin could not resist doing her signature eye-rolling at Ye Chong. She just wanted to keep her so-called "attitude" because Ye Chong was putting up an attitude with her and her friends too. Though her pupils might be rolling into the abyss in her head anytime soon, Ye Chong was not reacting since her so-called "attitude" was considered too unthreatening for him to make a move.

"Here it is," Yang An introduced the very building of their academy.

It was an awe-inspiring building.

Nevertheless, Ye Chong did not seem impressed while Xuelin carried on spitting her tongue with Cousin Xiu kindly advising her to stop it.

The main building was a foundation of about 800 floors tall - shaped like a gigantic circular beehive, with countless mechs flying into the openings from time to time like flocks of hornets.

The mechs were the main transportation on the planet at that time. It was a century of technological advancement. However, it did not mean that people had given up traveling by foot. In fact, there were a handful of students who retained walking as part of their routine and so were the people around. Pedestrians would never disappear because of some fancy technologies hovering everywhere above them as they strolled to their destination in leisure, admiring the view around them. And on this very planet, the Blue Ocean Academy was the one-and-only, one-of-a-kind, once-in-a-blue-moon institute that encompassed multiple dimensions of mechanical expertise. They had compiled the syllable and remastered the structure, which provided an efficient and effective learning experience. The Blue Ocean government also showed tremendous support in founding this establishment and

keeping it running.

Certainly, the Blue Ocean Academy did not fail their supporters as they finally made it into the top 100 academies in 5 major galaxies the year before last. They made it with a crash, like a charging chariot of scholars into the hall of the wisest fame, becoming the pride and admiration of residents on Blue Ocean Planet.

The school compound was as wide as a state. Well, technically, Blue Ocean Planet had only 4 states. One could imagine how tremendous the government's support to the academy was.

There were trees. Yes, trees! The long-extinct trees due to illegal logging could actually be found in the academy! They were well-taken care of too! Lumbers were the luxury in the market, the price was astronomical even for a piece of lumber with a diameter merely about 10 centimeters. Let alone a living tree, there where Ye Chong stood, lay a huge land of forest before him. Imagine the price of this forest! It was a much more rewarding investment than any other traditional property. As the age of the trees increased, the price would increase steadily too. It was just like wines, but thousands of bottles of them! And they did not need an appraiser to determine their value!

The enrollment was approximately 500,000 students, with a large number of them coming from planets far, far away.

As Ye Chong and his happy-go-lucky companions trekked on, he saw many students passing by, with most of them having an active discussion of the upcoming tournament. They seemed exceedingly excited. Ye Chong the usual indifferent one could understand their excitement. I mean, thousands and thousands of mechs soaring in the sky, do you know how grand the sight would be? Thought Ye Chong.

Obviously the tournament had become the star of the day, as a Pilot was the representation of power in this time. Being the freest

individual voyaging in the galaxy, they never failed to amaze the people not only with their skills, but also with the epic tales of their adventure. They were like the rangers, conquering the unknown; they were like the acrobats, agile yet bold. Their stories were colored by romance, branded by will. Their heroic appearance was also further reinforced as publicized by the government. The dauntless ideology of a pilot was popular among the lively youngsters. And most importantly the demonstration of their skills had become a dazzling entertainment to behold without fail. Applause came roaring like the waterfall; their names were shouted by the crowd. And of course, any big fans of the mechanism would not simply miss the tournament this time just to have a moment of happiness glancing at the strangest mech one could ever have seen and the greatest creativity a mech modification technician could have.

The adrenaline surged every stream of Ye Chong's veins under his skin. Ye Chong looked calm but his emotion grumbled, urging him to get moving. It was his first time seeing such a magnificent view.

And that awe in him slowly transformed into envy. He grew envious of these students. It must be wonderful to be able to study and live here since young. But... He discarded the thought entirely. It was not him to be sentimental of trivial things like this. Everyone had their own path to go. He understood the rule of life well.

Despite being in quite a naive environment, Ye Chong kept his alertness as he tried his best to maintain a set of distance away from people, which made him appear a little sociopathic in the crowd. Nonetheless, a crowd was still a crowd. It was so packed that Ye Chong's effort of keeping a distance from people became meaningless and unfulfilled. The situation to him was not foreign, however, he could only cope with helplessness. A place like this would bring utter murder in his viewpoint. It would practically be



the most dangerous, the best place for assassination. He strongly believed that if he were to commit a murder in a crowd like this, he would hardly be noticed.

"Hey!" A question popped up in his mind out of sudden, "Yang An, so, why haven't you thought of employing an actual mod technician, like... the real deal?"

"The school was fine with outsiders participating in the tournament. But with one condition - the age of the participant must be less than 25. In a simpler term, we have to find a technician younger than that. And a mech modification technician aged less than 25? That's the catch. Only a genius could be an official technician before they turned 25. And there are not more than 10 geniuses in the entire Fal Galaxy," explained Yang An.

Yang An could be clarifying the scenario in an dramatic and elaborative way, but Ye Chong did not really care of how he said. He's got the point anyway, and he was very much aware of the reason behind such condition.

Surely if he were to just compare himself with the certified mod technicians out there, he would not feel much of how outstanding a mere 25-year-old official mechanic could be. He was only 20 too. But wonder how his mindset would change if he ever knew the fact that a normal mod technician would already be 28 by the time of graduation. They had a stern assessment for this title. The students had to take up further education after they graduated. After they had passed that, they had to undergo an internship for about 2 years. And they strictly could not produce any form of inaccuracies (or mistakes) of more than 5% of the entire timeframe of performance. Only then they would be officially bestowed with the title. So a normal mod technician would be at least 33 years old.

Well, as what Yang An had mentioned, while it sounded literally impossible to be a recognized mod technician before 25, there were geniuses. If you happened to have some revolutionary theory or invention that actually got the attention of the 5 major galaxies'

prominent organizations and they gave you the recognition while you passed the assessment by the Mod. Technician Association (MTA), you could skip all the way to internship. If you also successfully completed your internship without making mistakes of more than 3% in the period, you would be certified right away.

This was some exclusive standard beyond the SOP that had attracted tons of experts from everywhere in the galaxy. They were serious, like dead-serious, that to the senior group, this tournament was as significant as their year-end assessment to get their certification. As for the junior group, they were highly participative, willing to challenge their limits. Some might have argued that it did not sound that serious but these students were the kind who would head out and hunt for experts from other schools or even the hermits hidden in the villages outside, all just to win the tournament. This led to the interaction between schools to exchange ideology and inventive methodology, all for the advancement of the academy. It was part of the Blue Ocean Academy's plan as the school would also pay the outsiders handsomely to encourage enrollment, especially to those geniuses who learned everything themselves yet concealing themselves among the people.

Every potential counts!

That was the vision of the academy.

Ye Chong entered the building with Yang An's gang. There were still a little bit more time till their turn.

Oh?

Ye Chong's eyes detected something fun. He went to the spectator's area. It was the race, the race of flight. It was surprisingly as intense as the combat between mechs he had spectated back then. The zooming velocity to the finale of speed of war in the sky, the sonic boom caused by the friction as the mechs shredded the air with their compelling momentum, the whirlwind

that veiled a screen of sand as they passed by, the scream from the people in thrill; those were blood-boiling to Ye Chong as his hands grabbed the metal fence tight.

"Time to go," Yang An said as he hauled Ye Chong away from the spectator's area to a walkway with a plate written the number "5" at the entrance.

A touch-screen processor projected in a hologram stood there at the side. "Your I.D." Yang An motioned with his hands.

Ye Chong took the card out from his pocket. "Put it in," pointed Yang An to the slot.

The hologram screen changed its interface as soon as Ye Chong inserted his card to the processor. A number of windows of Ye Chong's biography popped up.

Name: Ye Chong

Age: 20

That was all it mattered. At the age section, it clearly wrote "20". Definitely nothing should go wrong at this point. Yang An let off a sigh of relief. It looked like all his anxiousness could finally get on hold.

"Oh and pick 'external' at the 'participant type' section!" reminded Yang An.

Beep! The mechanical voice rang, "Ye Chong, age, 20, external participation fulfilled the condition, please select the participating title."

This was simple. Ye Chong just picked "mech modification technician" himself without Yang An's nagging reminder.

"Please input the index number of the participating group."

...

Yang An stayed silent. Ye Chong was thinking just when he really needed a reminder, the person kept his mouth shut. Only after he

gave a stare for a moment, Yang An hastily recited the group's index number, "That'd be HL659874!"

Thud! Thud! Thud! ... Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud! Thud!

... Ye Chong checked the input for a few times. Yup, that was right! And he pressed "Enter", "Congratulations! Registration completed!" the voice rang.

The registration process of Blue Ocean Academy was easy and hassle-free. This was to encourage participation of nonmembers.

"Alright. This walkway is where you would enter to get your show on. For now, calm down, collect your thoughts, muster your courage and skills because you are on your own without Yining. You are the last man standing, you know?"

"Okay," a typical disyllabic reply from Ye Chong came flatly.

Ye Chong adjusted his breathing pattern accordingly. He was trying to calm himself to a point where he would feel serene yet a little worked up at the same time. And this! This is the battle! A war! And Ye Chong would not have letups for any war coming by! It was for his survival! 100% effort for 100% survival rate! The faith Ye Chong had in his battle!

Both of them actually waited for half an hour. It could be the longest 30 minutes for any 20-year-old newbie in the business but Ye Chong was not acting impatient. He was not agitated too. And Yang An was again impressed by Ye Chong's mental clarity.

Beeeeep! The electronic voice announced, "HL659874! Group HL659874, please have your mech modification technician, Mr. Ye Chong ready. Your match is beginning in 5 minutes. Kindly prepare yourself!"

"Well..." Yang An sounded worried, "Yining is not here... and I have no idea how the interior looks like. But... you know, just go in and do what you are good at!"

Ye Chong nodded his head.

The 5 minutes lapsed like seconds. Ding-dong!

"The match shall start immediately. Mech modification technician of Group: HL659874, HL659874, kindly enter the room right away."

Ye Chong went right in front of the door.

Zzzzzt!

"Scan completed! Identity: Ye Chong, verified. Biography, matched! Please proceed."

The two-paneled door slid open both sides in a hush. And right after he entered through the door, there was another door. The door only opened after the one at his back went shut.

Ye Chong casually stepped into the room.

The previous match had ended a moment ago and undeniably it was a remarkable performance, where the audience's applause still roared inside the room as they anticipated the next contestant. Hologram screens projecting visuals in high-definition were everywhere in the school compound of various sizes going from screens as huge as 100 meters to screens as tiny as 10 centimeters. Whether it was a huge or tiny screen, there was no doubt that there would be hordes surrounding it. The Blue Ocean Academy held the tournament open to spectators who also wanted to join along the fun, but the entire event was not live on the media. This meant that if you wanted to watch the show, you had to come here by yourself. And of course, with the academy's reputation, people would come flocking for the show of the year. The annual population of spectators was always as grand as the tournament itself.

The screens would cast the contestants from all angles. The camera skills were absolutely mind-blowing - they never failed to capture the best moments of every contestant which they would replay and cause exclamation among the crowd.

At the spectator's area, Xiu gripped Xuelin's sleeve nervously. Her crystal-clear eyes searched that very silhouette she recognized on the screens. Ke Han had already hit the ground running, preparing for his turn. Yang An on the other hand was guarding at the entrance of walkway No. 5, remaining the poor girls at the seats watching everything restlessly.

"The match will begin in T-5"

"4"

"3"

The figure rolled on the screen.

"2"

"1"

At the next moment, the screens were full of sparks and embers as the contestants jumped themselves on the machineries before them with tools in their hands.

The angles were ever-changing. The eyes were too busy watching.

Out of the blue, the audience cried out almost simultaneously, stirring up a fiasco in Blue Ocean Academy as the few hundreds of thousands of people roared on. And at one point, they stopped, like a sudden brake of the racing horses. They engulfed their scream as their eyes were all fixed on that silhouette on one screen.

The crowd went dead silent.

# Chapter 79: It's Showtime I

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Ye Chong's match began as soon as he set foot into the mod room. He calibrated his body and his senses. Yes, calibration, one of the intriguing character settings Ye Chong had for his survival, or "adjustments" some called it, a foreign environment could always give Ye Chong a strong sense of vigilance. Even though realistically there would not be any threat in the securely sealed room, he carried on doing it as part of his instinct. As mentioned, it was not a "skill" that could be toggled on and off by will. It was a "setting" reoccurring on him. His frigid stare toured the room.

The truth is, Ye Chong had no idea that all his actions were fully captured by the cameras inside the room. Everyone could see even his slightest gesture through the hologram screen.

His "calibration" might appear as insignificant as gestures, but it did raise some exclamations in the crowd. They sprung from their seats unnervingly then they realized how embarrassingly they just acted as they fell back to their places quickly. Their eyes rolled, all fixed on that particular screen with Ye Chong, looking intrigued as they smiled.

At the other corners of the spectator's area, some of them stood up as well. They too looked surprise through the flicks of their eyes.

Ye Chong observed his surrounding carefully.

It was a room of about 300 meters long and 100 meters broad. A huge room where all sorts of parts needed to build a mech were placed along with a processor at the center.

Beep!

The processor prompted, "You may use all the parts provided in this room. To begin, submit your design here at the processor. You have 45 minutes to complete the entire modification process. If

you failed to complete the modification process in the time allocated, marks would be deducted accordingly. Also, the pilot of your group would be piloting an R-1 default mech to complete the upcoming race instead."

He started inspecting the parts on the ground. Wow! He was astounded. He had to admit that the Blue Ocean Academy did have some money in their pockets. Even the parts in the mod room alone could cost dearly and they replenished the parts for every participant. Imagine the expenditure just to sustain the matches!

Wonder how Ye Chong would react if he knew that the category he took part in was only one of the 32 categories in the whole academy.

Well, there's always time for that but not now.

Ye Chong calmed his mind.

His sharp eyes discerned every scattered parts on the ground. He had remembered them by heart. He pondered for a moment and then strode towards the processor in the middle of the room. Standing before the processor, under the bright spotlights, he grimly submitted his design plan.

At the broadcasting room, people had been as busy as bees. Due to the overwhelming population of contestants, the audience should be perplexed identifying the contestants on the screens and they should also be puzzled picking contestants to watch and to cheer. This issue became the studio's responsibility to resolve. The broadcaster had to give commentaries to explain the senses behind the participants' mech designs to keep the audience entertained and not be swamped by jargons and ambiguity in certain behaviors by the participants - the hows and whys. Furthermore, in every mod room there would be one staff who observed the happenings and reported the striking moment of the contestants immediately to the central studio while the central studio selected the better ones to roll on the main hologram screens. In a nutshell,



everything concerns one factor - speed. Move fast! Move faster! Move fastest! The audience wants to see sweat! Tears! Passion! Love! Diligence! Move! Move! Move!

The executive director behind the scene for the tournament this year was Rui Su, the vice president of the Broadcasting course.

Rui Su completed her studies in broadcasting course of Blue Ocean Academy at the age of 23. Additionally, she obtained her recognition from the senior director with her academic paper titled "The Theory of Usage of Motion in a Mutual Relationship with Limited View" which only took her 1 year to finalize, and hence becoming the youngest executive director in the history of Blue Ocean Academy. In the second year of her career, which happened to be this year, the academy requested her to take over the position of the vice president of the Broadcasting course.

Without doubt, this was Rui Su's first ever Blue Ocean Academy Tournament directing job.

The silky long dark hair laid on her shoulders gently like a small stream of waterfall on a silent night, while her eyes shone in clear sapphire like the puddle of seawater in the tender fondle. The beauty of the sea lustered in her charm, as if one could feel the sea literally just by standing next to her - the tranquillity, the serenity. Her skin was fairer than winter's snow; her face was polished like the jades, adorned with the tiny pair of lips, in a scarlet glow which brought up an epic beauty crafted in the finest manner. The curves on her body was beyond well-proportioned and would stimulate with the slightest turn.

Unquestionably, every part of her could be the best view for a man - angelic and eye-healing.

Everyone thought the same the first moment they saw her, till the view actually collapsed right onto their faces; they learned something for the day. The fiercest storm always starts with the sweetest rain.

"Are you guys retarded? Did all of you sleep through your lectures back then? You can't even carry out the simplest order! I'm telling all of you, if you are ever capable to mess up my work this time... Hmph! You are just as capable as repeating your subjects for this semester! I'm just impressed by how you guys have the balls to slack right in front of me. Do you wish to die right here and right now? Hey!" Her flamethrower aimed at one of the students passing by, "Hey! Hey! Hey! Wang Xiao'er! Are your eyes peeled and your ears opened? Do you want me to do it for you instead? Move your lazy bottom and get the job done! You have been a good student in the past. Why are you acting flaccid like you're a freshman who doesn't know anything about broadcasting on such an important event today? Did your willy just grow inwards? Are you still a man? Can you get hard?" her voice raised the tempest, filled with wrath and corrosive words.

Wang Xiao'er's slender body shivered under the howling voice of the devil in the studio. No one else could lend a hand to him because they were running away. However, because of her howls, everyone acted much quicker.

Rui Sui grumbled as she sat down, "What a bunch of complete retard! They can't even help me out at a moment like this! What did I do to deal with all these? These Year 1 students are dumber than donkeys. They have at least studied their basics, yet they are acting like they are on their first day in the academy. Why don't we just employ donkeys to do the work for us instead? It helps in saving the academy's expenditure." She might have sounded harsh but her charm never fades.

Out of the blue, a shriek from Wang Xiao'er resounded throughout the pack of students rushing in the studio. And that was the last straw to Rui Su's temper outburst, "Wang! Xiao! Er! Do you really want to die today? I could grant your wish you know! You were a good boy! Well! Not anymore! I can't believe you are brave enough to create another mess to the job today!" It was just a

step before she launched her whirlwind kick combo at the paperback Wang Xiao'er. Nonetheless, she held it back as she knew that if she ever did her signature diving kick, with her strength, the paper Wang Xiao'er would be shredded on spot.

And she retreated her lifted legs.

The undelivered final blow did shock Wang Xiao'er for a few seconds, then his pale cheeks shuddered as he screamed in shaking voice, "Sister, come and take a look at this!" he pointed at the screen before him.

Rui Su forbade the students to greet her as "teacher" or "madam" or weak names like "Ms. Rui Su". Those would truly make her sound dramatically older she claimed. Thus, everyone should only greet her as "Sister".

"Wang Xiao'er!" She walked towards the quivering boy on his seat, mumbling, "If this is one of your stupid tricks to get away from your trouble today, you better be either picking a morgue or a hospital to stay in."

She was mumbling, till she slammed on the front desk before the screen. She zipped her mouth and stared the screen with focus. That was her personality when she went into work mode - professional and fully concentrated.

It was as if she was possessed. Upon having a closer look at what was going on in the screen, her eyes enlarged, wide like the saucers!

She went in utter silence for the next few seconds and had an inertia as she came back. The impact from the screen scorched her feet as she jumped up high and stormed to her seat, hurrying the boy, "Wang Xiao'er! Quick! Get the channel over here!"

"Yes," replied Wang Xiao'er.

The audience at the spectator's area noticed it coming suddenly. All the screens were only projecting at one particular person.

The contestant from Mod Room No.5!

"Ah!" Xuelin and Cousin Xiu screeched together after realizing who it was. Cousin Xiu covering her little mouth in disbelief along with Xuelin who had her mouth widely open.

Mod Room No.5! That would be Ye Chong!

Before their astonishment settled down, the audience in the entire row of the spectators area jumped up hurrahing. Rui Su actually had switched all the screens in the school compound to the visual at Mod Room No.5!

And that was when few hundred thousands of spectators in the whole campus saw an unforgettable scene for their lives!

On the screen the man waved his hands like a magician. In full focus, his hands slid the parts under like a breeze on a spring. Well that description did not sound that applause-worthy, since all mod technicians had to master that trick!

It was not the trick. It was his hands! Ye Chong's hands!

Ye Chong finally demonstrated the frightening speed of his hands, the first time in the public, right in front of hundreds of thousands of people. Sadly he was not aware of what an amazing achievement he had just accomplished. Revealing his only deadly capability to the entire world. If only he knew what actually happened, he would be jumping off the building.

To Ye Chong, revealing the arsenal of his abilities was no more than suicidal.

Ye Chong literally had no idea that his actions would be wholly broadcasted throughout the academy. Without the help of Yining, that was what he could only do. To make use of his abilities to the fullest! With great concentration! Being entirely engaged to the process, he did not see how fearsome his speed was.

His hands were so agile that they do not feel belonged to a human. The afterimages of his movements were faint yet still

recognizable. Nobody questioned its authenticity.

The space, was soundless.

Everyone watched on and was barely hushing.

The sky of the quiet campus echoed with the excited voices of the commentaries, "Holy Fal Galaxy! In what Blue Ocean world are those pair of hands! Such a scary speed on a mod technician, enough to terrify the students from the Piloting course hiding back into their cabins! With such a speed, what could still be impossible to our fine contestant? Oh? Hmm... Yes, yes." The commentator lowered his voice as the sound of paper ruffling came.

He cleared his throat, "We had just obtained the biography of this very contestant in our tournament today! Apparently, this phenomenal contestant in Room No.5 is none other than Ye Chong. He is only 20 years old. Oh, my, Fal, Galaxy! 20 years old! Our students would be a mere freshman being pampered everywhere if they were 20-year-olds! This is stunning! Staggering! Mind-opening! Evidently, he is not only a genius, but a genius among the geniuses! And... hmm... What! I can't believe it! Ye Chong is not a student in our campus too! And there is zero record about his education background! So, I strongly believe that nobody would disagree on what I had just said!"

The commentator's tone turned teasing, "Hehehehe. I know our beloved principal had just gotten the biography in hand and must be all wet and panicking begging for the tournament to end right away only to meet with this boy! Principal, your eyes desired something, am I right? Haha!"

And the audience laughed along.

"What?" Another moment of paper ruffling the microphone, "O.M.F.G.! Oh My Fal Galaxy! Did this just happen? The staff had passed me the hand-speed report of this Ye Chong boy a moment ago and guess what? According to the outcome shown, within the duration we talked just now, Ye Chong had achieved a

groundbreaking speed of Mach 3.57 at the highest! Gosh! Did he modify his hands into an engine with artificial intelligence?"

And the audience exclaimed.

Mach 3.57!

The whispers scurried the spectator's area, "Is that even a speed by human?"

That last line from the commentary did tickle the funny-bone in everyone though.

Mach 3.57 was not fast enough to Ye Chong. It was not because he wanted to hide his strength, it was merely because he was yet to familiarize with the modification process that he had to slow down to minimize mistakes. It was justifiable considering how he had only spent a few days at Yining's house. Nevertheless it was astounding enough for him to hit this speed.

That was not all.

The scene after this had launched a full barrel of fiasco at the crowd.

It's showtime!

## Chapter 80: It's Showtime II

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Ye Chong seemed to have utterly lost himself in the process. He was so absorbed by the fun of modifying mech. Moreover he was much more focused than before without Yining this time, since he also skipped the idle chatter and was fully invested to the modification process.

He grew acquainted with the apparatuses and his hands moved faster. The afterimages had started overlapping on each other. It was as if the audiences were watching some Sci-Fi movie; their mouths stayed open in disbelief.

"Madness! Insanity! Ye Chong, our contestant is going faster! Based on the data we had freshly obtained, Ye Chong has already achieved a whopping Mach 3.88 at his hands! Looks like our champion in the making is doing fantastic! I wonder if he ever has a limit or is this actually his maximum? Well nobody knows! That's why we would watch on in curiosity and to witness the show of the century!"

Ye Chong was engrossed in every detail of his craft. He looked all concentrated and the grim face of his slowly turned gentle. The sober was washed away by his passion towards mechs, exerting a one-of-a-kind magnetism. The stern eyes were cleansed as they sparkled in a refined wisdom and craftsmanship! The face and his smooth, continuous movements gleamed like a diamond rinsed from the mud. It was dazzling, yet so mesmerizing. No one was bothered by his torn clothings and no one cared if he was not handsome enough for the standard of public. At that very moment, he was the center of the tempest swirling the entire academy! He attracted everyone's attention and had blinded the audience from seeing the potent performance by the other contestants!

As the audience had their eyes frozen on Ye Chong, the shape of the modified mech started becoming discernible.

The sound of paper muffling the microphone echoed, "Okay, we had just acquired the design plan submitted by Ye Chong. Well, by our standard of conduct, this should never be available till the end of the tournament. But thanks to our diligent staff and our supportive fans below, our loving principal had finally agreed to bestow this to us under special permission. It was quite a hassle but I would guarantee this would worth the trouble we had gone through! Alright..."

"Hmm... Hmm..." the commentator took a glance at the papers.

"Yes! Yes! Yes! The moment we looked at this plan, everyone of us at the studio held the same thought; this person is absolutely a genius among the geniuses! Assuming Ye Chong's frightening speed of his hands has defined us his impressive discipline in self-training, then this very piece of plan could easily define to all of us here today, that he also possesses masterly knowledge! And I would like to highlight something for everyone on the seat - this piece of design was rated a perfect score at our mech modification assessment system! In addition, the concept of his design is overwhelming enough to make all our 12 advanced mech modification technician nod their heads! They responded simultaneously with approval. A perfect score! A masterpiece!"

And that comment landed on the audience like an atomic bomb. The audience could no longer inhibit the fiasco rumbling inside them. Hisses, bustles and rustles took over the floor.

Cousin Xiu's eyes were totally glued at the screen watching Ye Chong. Her eyes glossed like a lake in autumn, calm and still yet seemingly uneasy. She seemed to be figuring out something in her mind. Meanwhile, Xuelin had lowered her head, with the expression changing from time to time. Her face was once blushed, then it became drained. Sometimes one could hear her mutters or sound of her grinding her teeth. Her eyes wavered, her lips quivered.

"Well, well, well. Plot twist: Ye Chong is a super processor



himself! In b4 his mechanical arm broke from that speed!" tossing a meme, the commentator spoke on humorously.

And everyone at the bottom laughed out loud.

"A new glorious record has been written today at this tournament 300 years after the academy was founded. Gorgeous it was yet saddening! Since it wasn't our student who made the record! We should be ashamed of our inability! Sniff sniff!" The commentator's voice sounded remorseful and that made most of the actual students from the academy lowering their heads embarrassingly.

"Anyway! We should take the precious time to have some word about Ye Chong's acclaimed design of perfection! Firstly, Ye Chong actually discarded the traditional humanoid design for his mech. In exchange, he incorporated the design of an aircraft for the main body. It is a daring attempt as the humanoid designs aren't widely used for no reason today. However, an aircraft design is undeniably much more practical for the upcoming race. The reason is that the limbs of a humanoid design do not contribute anything to speed. Our aircrafts are mostly circular nowadays, in which the design was not fancied by our Ye Chong. He dropped the idea of the mainstream aircrafts and went for the ancient design - the arrowhead to build the main body."

The audience boomed in exclamation. It looked like they were the corns rolling in the popcorn machine, exploding anytime soon if more shocking facts were fed upon them.

"For the engine, he had selected Firebird-III, also a non-mainstream engine choice. And believe me, most of the students don't even have an idea of what a Firebird-III is. Generally, the Firebird-III provides forceful motion while only having 1/2 of the weight of the mainstream engine choices in the same category. It also has the largest scope of direction control among the other engines of its grade. This vitally eliminates the major issue of lack of direction control in the arrowhead design. The downside of this

choice though is its overwhelming energy drain. However, it remained as the chosen one by our Ye Chong." The commentator took a quick sip and carried on explaining.

"Contrary to the usual mechs, the side wings at the front of the mech do not simply consist of flimsy metallic board, instead, a few more additional engines are installed on them. That would permit the ability of a large scope of direction change, but it would be quite challenging to the pilot of this craft.

Moving on with the shape, unlike the traditional arrowhead designs, Ye Chong seemed to have tweaked the aerodynamic aspect of this design - which would further reduce the C.D. of the former designs. Just in case our audience was confused by the fancy terminology, C.D. as in Coefficient of Drag means the level of drag or resistance of an object when it travels in fluid environment like the air in this tournament. Fundamentally this has justified the fact that our Ye Chong wields great theoretical knowledge. Certainly amazing! How many of us who are 30 years old and below today would even have interest in theoretical knowledge? Let alone being able to acquire such a result!

Next, there is also something unique about the location of center of gravity for his design. It's very bold..."

Before the commentator's voice landed, the screen changed as it zoomed away from Ye Chong, showing the whole craft.

Ye Chong had completed all the necessary modification. Seeing how he was left with ample time, he leisurely took a can of spray and began painting the mech blue. A light blue arrowhead, which would obviously cause another round of chatter at the audience below.

The mech was literally Gliding Joy! The one he created at Yining's place before!

The Gliding Joy this time was slightly different than the one before. This was because Ye Chong took the time to further fine-

tune the design of its main body. Of course, Shang would take most of the credits during this. Shang was unhappy being "enslaved" by Ye Chong and he was angrier than ever at the fact that Ye Chong purposely ran away from his ultimate chemist training. Well, we all knew that Ye Chong did not give a damn. To avoid that, Ye Chong eventually succumbed to 24/7 modification designing.

Ye Chong's deep interest for mech seemed to be inborn. The mech theories were not as disinteresting as the chemist's theories. At least Ye Chong knew where Shang was going when he briefed about mechs. Once Shang switched to the chemist lecture mode, Ye Chong only knew he had to run... and run fast!

Shang could only whined a bit in the end. Since it was indeed pointless of him to lecture if there was no practical for Ye Chong to work with.

Back to the stage, Ye Chong felt something was amiss. Oh yes! He grabbed another can of spray and painted two large letters at the body. "G.J." which is an abbreviation for Gliding Joy - the wavy curve of the G with the the silver hook at the J intrepidly. Cheekily, Ye Chong tossed the can away and declared the completion of his mech, the Gliding Joy!

"Ye Chong our boy turned and squinted, 'ain't nobody got time for that!' He had much better things to do than putting the can back nicely. But well this is what a bad boy would do. Go hide your kids before they get hit! Wait, hide your flowers too!" The commentator humored Ye Chong's throw.

One must admit that Ye Chong did have a great luck. In every room, the choices of the parts given were actually different from each other, with some of them being randomly given. Yes, that means Ye Chong had Firebird-III in his room by luck! No, by fate!

Ye Chong fondled the glossy skin of his baby. That profoundly devoted gaze of his was shrill-worthy for the kitties at the spectator's area.

Just when the audience was going to start applauding, something surprising happened again!

Ye Chong took a flip and went into the cabin.

Yes! The cabin!

"What he's doing?"

"I don't know. I have enough shock for today..."

"I had lost track of what's happening..."

"I don't want to live on this planet anymore..."

Everyone was stupefied, including the commentator who shut his mouth and watched carefully what Ye Chong was doing. He would not want to miss a detail of an anticipated miracle from this boy.

Beep.

Gliding Joy activated.

"What?" The people were terrified.

"Did he just turn on the mech he just built?"

"Has he even tested his mech?"

"Of course not! That aside, is he committing suicide?"

"Oh my gosh... Does he know where he is? That is the mod room! The indoors! With only 150 meter away from the walls, even a normal speed of mech about Mach 2 would take 1 second to hit the wall."

"Somebody stop him!"

"That means, he's going to suicide?"

The crowd panicked.

The girls at the seats began shrieking in fear. People covered their eyes as they refused to witness a brutal crash from a genius. They would never be able to face such ending for a boy, of becoming a splat of flesh on the wall with scraps of metal on the

ground!

"Stop! Stop! Stop!" Even the commentator could hold it no longer, "Ah!"

No one could imagine of piloting a mech at high speed in a narrow room like this! It skips one's heartbeat even from thinking about it. The intensity started building in everyone's mind, like a dynamite blowing up soon.

"Is he mad?"

"Does he really think it's his showtime? That's why he wanted to put off a show?"

"I don't know. He could be the stupidest genius I ever came across. Hahahaha." The envious participants sneered as they whispered.

"He's gonn-" The noise stopped abruptly as Ye Chong on his Gliding Joy disappeared like a strike of blue lightning, right in front of everybody.

The expecting collision did not occur.

The light blue Gliding Joy reappeared as it braked 2 meters right before the wall. Such a visual impact to everyone at the tournament, a prime definition of extreme-motion to extreme-motionless, a heart-shocker!

"Di-Did... Did he just accelerate at a 150 meter distance? I-Is that even possible?"

"No way! No way I'm digesting this! This has to be due to pure coincidence! Yeah! Luck! He was just lucky!"

The whispers went on.

"Well, that is it! Ladies and gentleman!" The commentator sighed in relief, "The Lady Luck seemed to have smiled at Ye Chong today! He actually stopped right before the wall in such a brief distance! This is extraordinary! This is unbelievable! I guess the God would

fear losing such a genius this quickly too! But oh my, Ye Chong, you should really learn from your fatal mistake! The pressure-buffering system in a racing mech is obsolete by nature and might be insufficient to protect the impact from your behavior just now! Please value your life more than anything else! This is for everybody at the seats as well!"

And the crowd nodded heavily in agreement.

His action was heart-wrecking indeed. There were quite a few people whose hearts literally skipped a beat when they saw what Ye Chong did. Their faces turned pale and seemed to be collapsing.

On the other hand, Ye Chong jumped out of Gliding Joy normally. Yes, normally. His expression was bland, as usual. There was hardly any expression, as if the thrill he did was nothing. The grim on his face returned as indifferently as he stared at his masterpiece. The kitties on their seats screamed on top of their lungs again, "Ye Chong! Oh my!" "He's so cool!" "I can't take it anymore!" "Such dangerous man, if that's dangerous, I'll be dangerous too!"

The YC fans club seemed to be sprouting anytime soon.

Ye Chong did not seem to be interested though. He walked to the processor at the center of the room, pushed a few buttons to officially declare his completion.

# Chapter 81: The Headmaster's Invitation

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Ye Chong exited the modification workshop, and immediately saw a middle-aged man standing beside Yang An. Ye Chong couldn't help but wear a guarded expression. Little did he know that the outside world was already stirred up by his appearance! The entirety of Blue Ocean Academy's students knew that, as was tradition, a talent like him would be invited to join the Academy! Everyone was interested in knowing whether their beloved headmaster was up to the task!

Ye Chong's performance earlier exceeded even the average teacher's. The students of Blue Ocean Academy were all of the arrogant and egotistical sort, but when faced with someone truly capable, they would have genuine respect for the person.

Ye Chong had impressed this cohort with his remarkable skills!

He knew right away that the unfamiliar middle-aged man before him had waited on him for quite some time. His big belly coupled with a formal outfit made him look like an extraordinary person. However, that was not Ye Chong's first impression! The man's hands were flabby and smooth, showing no signs of training. His body shape was thoroughly imbalanced, with deplorable physical abilities. Ye Chong was certain that he could defeat the man within two seconds. The man's eyes were calm, seemingly without hostility.

Ye Chong completed his mental assessment of the man almost instantly.

It was after that that Ye Chong noticed other particulars, such as the lack of any facial hair and the man's graceful demeanour. He kept a smile on his face, giving the impression of a gentle and amiable person. Ye Chong did not loosen up despite of those facts. Yang An seemed to be extra courteous before the middle-aged man.

Ye Chong looked at the other party coldly, unwilling to make

first contact.

The middle-aged man laughed and offered his hand, "How do you do, I'm Blue Ocean Academy's headmaster, Lan Youming, a pleasure to meet you!"

Ye Chong stared at the headmaster's right hand guardedly. "What's with the hand?" Ye Chong stared back at Headmaster Lan, fully alert!

Shang could not bear it any longer, and spoke inside Ye Chong's mind. "Idiot, that's etiquette! Don't you know etiquette? Heavens, what has Mu been teaching you all this while? Does he intend for you to be a wild animal? Poor Ye!"

"Etiquette?" Ye Chong asked in his mind, thoroughly confused. "That's way too dangerous, what if the enemy suddenly attacked?"

Shang spoke with great frustration, "Heavens, Ye, you have to change your mindset. They're humans, not wild beasts! Humans wouldn't attack each other for no reason! Hmm, quick, shake his hand, if you ignore someone who's offered their hand, it's an extremely rude behaviour."

"Hmm, right, that's it, just shake gently. If you want to express good will, just apply a little more force. Heavens! Ye, he's not a wild animal! How can you use so much force on him?" Shang was exasperated.

Headmaster Lan dreadfully howled as Ye Chong's hand clamped tightly on his right hand like a pair of pincers. He could even hear bones softly cracking from his right hand, and felt that he could faint at any moment! Upon hearing Shang's words, Ye Chong retracted his right hand, swift as lightning. Headmaster Lan could no longer stand the pain, as he cradled his right hand and panted heavily, and lost his initial composure.

Ye Chong defended himself, aggrieved at the encounter. "I wasn't holding him too tight!"



Shang gave a helpless assessment of the situation, "You are inhuman!"

Yang An stared stupefied at the scene before him, his mind stalled completely!

Ye Chong and Yang An both watched as Headmaster Lan jumped around in pain. Ye Chong was surprised - while Headmaster Lan was plump, his current series of actions showed unusual agility.

"You should apologize now, since your mistake has led to another person's being harmed. That's right, you should apologize now!"

"Apologize? My mistake? But I didn't do anything wrong!" Ye Chong was at a loss, and added, "He seemed to be too weak, and his retaliation skills are absurd!" Ye Chong provided his professional opinion.

Shang felt like jumping off a cliff. "No matter what, you should apologize first!"

Ye Chong was alright with that. "If you insist, then sure!" Ye Chong usually obeyed Mu's requests; Shang's, however, were only agreed to when he thought they were not too extraordinary. For Ye Chong, Shang was far worse than Mu's reasoning!

However, an apology did not seem to cost him much!

Ye Chong apologized to Headmaster Lan without his heart into it. "I'm very sorry, I did not expect you to be so weak, my apologies!" Ye Chong's ridiculous apology did not sound like one at all.

"You call that an apology?" Shang asked.

"Of course!" Ye Chong was certain of it.

"I think it sounds more like a victor's speech!" Shang countered.

"Mm, what's the difference?" Ye Chong said, after a moment's thought.

Shang stopped speaking and raised his white flag!

From the side, Yang An saw a bruise forming on Headmaster Lan's hand, and could not suppress the chill from within him. He decided then and there to never have any physical contact with Ye Chong.

Headmaster Lan seemed to finally feel better, and even managed to force a smile. "It's no problem, no problem at all, who'd imagine Mr Ye here to be so strong! As expected, Mr Ye is blessed with great raw talent. To have such high achievements at such a young age, how impressive!"

Ye Chong stared at Headmaster Lan silently, making Headmaster Lan feel a little awkward.

Shang could not stand the situation and offered, "Ye, when someone is done speaking, it is best if you can return the courtesy, or the conversation will become very awkward!"

Ye Chong replied point-blank, "But his words all seemed meaningless!"

"Er ... Just ignore me!" Shang returned to his space.

Headmaster Lan seemed to realise that Ye Chong was not suited for this kind of conversation, and immediately switched his tact. "Mr Ye, I'd like to invite you to become a teacher at our Blue Ocean Academy! What do you say?"

Standing at the side, Yang An stared with bulging eyes, gaping at the two! "Sir, are you sure? Blue Ocean Academy's teacher?" Ye Chong may not understand, but Yang An, who had grown up in Blue Ocean, knew that all teachers of Blue Ocean Academy are prestigious in the eyes of Blue Ocean citizens, and that Blue Ocean Academy was a possible gateway for one to enter upper class society. As for the academy's teachers, they were already members of the upper class society. The Blue Ocean Academy's teachers have all made their name, and the only teacher in the academy below the age of thirty was Rui Su. At least Rui Su was twenty five, but Ye Chong was only twenty! For someone at his age, even if he

was a student in the Blue Ocean Academy, he could only be one of the lower level students.

"Being a teacher? That's ludicrous!" Yang An thought as he looked at Ye Chong oddly, "This guy's a monster!"

Headmaster Lan explained his decision, "Mr Ye's missile shaped mech has a body structure that improves aerodynamic flow, and expressed Mr Ye's great understanding of the physics involved. All the teachers in our academy felt that you are capable enough to work as a teacher of the academy. Besides, I have asked for advice from the twelve judges, and they unanimously agreed that Mr. Ye is absolutely qualified for the job. Moreover, Mr Ye's exceptional modification skills, comparable to the work of expert mod technicians, are something we greatly appreciate! Of course, before Mr Ye began working for us, we'd still like to conduct a necessary test for Mr Ye. However, this is only one of the standard procedures, I believe, with Mr Ye's abilities, this test should not be a problem!"

Yang An stared in a daze at Ye Chong, desperately trying to understand the situation. He had been guarding outside ever since Ye Chong entered the workshop, and did not have time to watch the competition's live broadcast. Hence, he was completely ignorant of Ye Chong's stirring actions. He was already baffled when the headmaster had asked all sorts of things about Ye Chong! He did not imagine that the truth to be something like this!

"Of course, Mr Ye, please do not worry about your terms of employment. Compared to other first class academies in the five main galaxies, the terms of employment in our academy is definitely first class! Not only will we offer a high salary, we will also provide full support for Mr Ye's research projects! Besides, our academy is home to many great instructors, if Mr Ye would join us, you'll find that the academic atmosphere here is excellent, the teachers exchange ideas amongst themselves frequently. I believe this would be beneficial push for Mr Ye's future advancement!

"Should Mr Ye have any requests, please let us know, we'll do our best to sort things out for you! We, the Blue Ocean Academy, sincerely invite you to join us!"

Ye Chong was not really listening to Headmaster Lan's words, since he was speaking to Shang.

Shang had popped out again when Headmaster Lan offered a job for Ye Chong. The mech was very excited. "Hey, Ye, just say yes! Blue Ocean Academy's teachers are all treated well!" Shang clicked his tongue, "In comes the money when you join the Blue Ocean Academy! I can't believe even someone of your standard would be scouted by the Blue Ocean Academy ... That's gold zuan for us!"

Ye Chong disagreed. "Nope, I'm leaving, who's going to make the noodles for Grandpa Qian's shop?"

Shang gave that a thought. "That's true! But if you join the Blue Ocean Academy, your monthly salary is definitely way more than when working at Grandpa Qian's shop! You can allocate a portion of the money for Grandpa Qian, so he can enjoy his later years and does not need to work anymore!"

Ye Chong felt otherwise. "While I may not understand it, but I know Grandpa Qian does not think of money as his highest priority! It's not a problem about money!"

"Mm, a problem with the noodles then, right, doesn't Grandpa Qian have an automatic noodle making machine?" Shang asked.

"He does! But the noodles coming out that machine are gross!" Ye Chong replied.

Shang grew excited as he spoke, "So, if we can improve the automatic noodle making machine, er, maybe with some modifications, and take into account the various factors involved when you make the noodles yourself, I'm sure the machine can churn out noodles that taste as good as the ones you make!"

Ye Chong pondered over it, thought it feasible, and grew excited

too. "You're right, Shang, that's a wonderful idea! We have to try it out when we get back!" Ye Chong felt like leaving for home right then.

"But, Ye, we don't have any equipment, or materials, all these costs zuan! Without these things, we'll never be able to complete the task." Shang spoke as if afflicted.

Ye Chong was also vexed. "Yeah! That's a real problem, and I don't think those things come cheap!"

"Hmm, that's true, however, it's not that there's nothing we can do about it!" Shang replied in a queer tone.

# Chapter 82: Triumphant

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When Ye Chong requested to use the Blue Ocean Academy's modification workshop, Headmaster Lan agreed without any hesitation and even brought him to the academy's most advanced workshop himself! As Ye Chong entered Blue Ocean Academy's reputedly most advanced workshop, seeing rows and rows of dream-like top class machinery, he was mightily envious! Headmaster Lan generously declared that he was free to use the devices as he see fit, and that materials were provided too. Ye Chong felt like diving straight into his work!

Even Shang went into a frenzy, howling in excitement!

Headmaster Lan grinned as he saw Ye Chong's bland expression turn into a rich array of emotions for the first time. He was secretly pleased at himself. "Young man, I don't believe there's no way to keep you here!" Headmaster Lan had seen all sorts of people in his life, and knew the ways of appealing to one's interests!

Ye Chong began immediately, studying the many devices and mechanisms that he had never seen before, oblivious to Headmaster Lan, standing at the side!

Headmaster Lan smiled, taking no offense, and left quietly by himself. Before that, he ordered the person in charge of the workshop to fulfill Ye Chong's requests, whatever they may be! Of course, he hinted a little at the person's unfortunate and inevitable farewell to the academy should he fail to satisfy Ye Chong, and the employee felt fearful enough that he nodded profusely like a docile animal!

Ye Chong did not notice when Headmaster Lan left. If he knew that his vigilance had dropped to such a state, one wondered how he would take it. Shang was also uncharacteristically cooperative this time, accessing the virtual net and procuring the holographic schematics for an automatic noodle making machine without fuss.

Ye Chong and Shang discussed amongst themselves, while the person in charge of the modification workshop assisted by his side with great care, fearing that Ye Chong's dissatisfaction would leave him without a job!

The person in charge stared as Ye Chong went into a daze, quiet as a mouse, for fear of interrupting whatever strange thoughts Ye Chong was having at the moment.

As he thought of all the effort he had put into securing his job at Blue Ocean Academy, and all the sweat and tears, he felt extremely discontented!

While today's modern society would not allow anyone to die of starvation, a person without a stable job would have to visit the relief center to receive government aid. One was guaranteed a basic living condition, but to achieve more, one would have to climb up the economic ladder!

Ye Chong was having a heated discussion with Shang! While Ye Chong was far worse in calculations than Shang, his occasional insight often impressed both Shang and Mu! As such, Ye Chong often proposed some unusual concepts, while Mu and Shang demonstrated, complemented and improved those concepts!

Suddenly, Ye Chong thought of a problem, and began to look around him.

The person in charge saw Ye Chong's behaviour, and immediately knew that he was looking for something. He hastily approached Ye Chong and put a smile on his face. "What are you finding for? I'm the person in charge of this workshop, just let me know if you have questions. The headmaster had informed me that all the materials here are at your disposal!"

Ye Chong froze. When he realized that he did not notice a person being so close to him, his expression turned sour. He relaxed after deducing that the person had no ill will against him, and warned himself against such carelessness!

However, since the person had offered, Ye Chong spoke, "I need flour and water!"

The person in charge was all ready for Ye Chong to ask for the most precious and expensive materials, thinking that he must procure materials for Ye Chong, even if he had to stake his life for it. What he did not expect, after all the mental preparation, was for Ye Chong to ask for flour and water.

Ye Chong took over the flour and water that the person in charge had procured for him, and, right before the person's disbelieving eyes, he began to make noodles in Blue Ocean Academy's most advanced modification workshop.

After five hours of hard work, Ye Chong looked satisfied at the massive machine before him, while the person in charge stared in stupefaction. Since the modification workshop had no automatic noodle making machine, he had used the tools and materials in the workshop to make a new one under Shang's guidance.

Ye Chong carefully tasted the newly made noodles. The person in charge watched as Ye Chong used a mech's hollow leg that was over thirty kilograms heavy in place for a bowl, and felt like jumping off a building!

"Hmm, the taste was not bad, almost identical to the one I make myself." Of course, Ye Chong had no intention of inviting the person in charge for a taste. Instead, he swallowed all the noodles like a hungry tornado!

Ye Chong pointed to the automatic noodle making machine, and asked the person in charge, "Can I take this with me?"

The person in charge nodded mechanically.

He watched on as Ye Chong lifted the machine that weighed a few hundred kilograms and disappeared outside the door, and felt infinitely helpless. "Heavens, was the fellow crazy?" He felt like he had just seen a most sarcastic joke. "A person making noodles in



Blue Ocean Academy's most advanced modification workshop? Kneading the dough on an ultra-smooth benchtop, one of only a hundred in the entire Fal galaxy? Eating out of a hundred-thousand-zuan mech's hollow leg? He did not even clean the hollow leg up after finishing his meal!"

"Could it be that world was truly changing?" The person in charge felt like he burned a fuse in his brain somewhere, as he stared blankly at Ye Chong's gradually diminishing figure through the workshop's entrance.

The next day, news of Ye Chong's job offer acceptance as Blue Ocean Academy's mech mechanics teacher spread fast throughout the academy grounds, as though the news had grown a pair of wings. Everyone's attention was focused on the news, and the main event that was the MP Games had, for the first time in history, been largely ignored.

In the headmaster's office, only Ye Chong and the headmaster were present.

Headmaster Lan smiled lightly and said, "Mr Ye, please let me know if you have any requests! I think we'll make a great team!"

Ye Chong thought for a moment before speaking, "I'd like to take courses for alchemy!"

Shang leaped in excitement, having no indication of his decision beforehand. "Ye, hah, you've finally come around, that's great! Ah, weren't you reluctant to learn alchemy before this? What led to the change in mind?"

Ye Chong replied lightly, "It's nothing, I just want to get more Do Kun stone!"

"Even the obtuse can be enlightened?" Shang was not convinced, but spoke again after a pause, "Ye, I know you chose alchemy because of me, right?"

Ye Chong spoke apathetically, "Nope!"

Shang spoke with dismay, "Ye, don't answer so directly please, can you not just satisfy my tiny, tiny vanity?"

Ye Chong showed no signs of giving in. "No need for that!"

While the two were at an impasse with each other, a warm feeling was binding Ye Chong and Shang together!

"If only Mu can join us!" thought Ye Chong.

Headmaster Lan could not help but be surprised by Ye Chong's odd request, but managed to gather himself and agreed to the request. "Oh, sure, no problem! I didn't think Mr Ye was so interested in alchemy. I think the alchemy faculty's Teacher Jiang would definitely welcome academic exchanges with you! Mm, any other problems for you?"

Ye Chong replied crisply, "None!"

Headmaster Lan nodded with satisfaction. "Then please come with me!" Headmaster Lan led Ye Chong into an adjacent classroom, where a total of fifteen specialists sat within. They would assess Ye Chong's level and decide if he was the real deal, and if he was up to par to teach at Blue Ocean Academy!

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The whole building was crowded. The faculty of mech mechanics' students were all excited with the prospect of having Ye Chong as their teacher! Everyone was interested in the activities of this particular classroom!

Rui Su was also very enthusiastic!

Ye Chong's strong impact was directly related to Rui Su. If Rui Su had not braved herself and switched all of Blue Ocean Academy's channels to the one with Ye Chong, the effect would not be as strong! This was also the first time the MP Games had directed all its cameras to only one contestant! One should be aware that it was a great risk, and easily blamed upon!

However, she had triumphed this time! Her decisiveness and exceptional courage had brought her victory!

"Wang Xiaoer, you better point that holographic camera on target, if you do well this time, sister will reward you after! But don't you forget yourself, when Ye Chong comes out, you point the holographic camera straight at him, got it? Let me repeat that, point it straight at him, hehe, sister will go the front lines by then. Take care of the lighting angles. Also, set the audio sync device right! Heh, if you mess up it this time, hehe ..."

Rui Su would call herself "sister" when she was in a good mood, but when she was not, she would switch to the very crude "old lady"!

Rui Su stood handsomely before the entrance of the classroom. For today, she had specially dressed herself, her natural beauty now more charming than ever. The students at the side were all terrified of her, and none stood within ten meters of Rui Su!

The jam packed corridor offered the queer sight of a peerless beauty, with a circular perimeter around her devoid of any human being!

Rui Su smiled, pleased with herself. "Hehe, these youngsters have known suffering well enough through me!"

Rui Su was twenty five, a natural beauty. As she grew more mature these few years, her actions had the quality of a mature woman. This was not something naive little girls could compare themselves with.

Logically speaking, such a woman should have a whole line of suitors waiting on her!

However, Rui Su was very skilful. Back in her days of studying in Blue Ocean Academy, she was known as the infamous "Witch Su" of the Blue Ocean Academy, and all were terrified of her! She was not the kind of woman that most people would dare to meddle

with! Even some of the courageous sort had yielded under her methods. Of the new students that arrive every year, the ones who suffered in her hands were often in the hundreds!

The door to the classroom suddenly opened, and Ye Chong stepped out calmly, followed by Headmaster Lan, all smiles.

The corridor was instantly in an uproar!

Headmaster Lan, with his worldly experiences, was not troubled, but instead stepped quickly in front of Ye Chong and pushed his hands downwards, signaling everyone to quiet down!

The headmaster was known for his practicality, and enjoyed a high reputation amongst the students. They immediately quieted down, and even "Witch Su" was silent like an obedient young lady!

As everyone quieted down, Headmaster Lan laughed pleasantly. "Good news to you all, Mr Ye Chong is officially recruited by Blue Ocean Academy as a teacher under the faculty of mech mechanics. Everyone is welcomed to join Teacher Ye's classes!"

Once again, the entire block roared with excitement!

# Chapter 83: Suspicion

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Headmaster Lan looked to Ye Chong and nodded, signaling that he could leave!

Ye Chong headed outside, his expression was none other than his usual coldness and indifference. A path somehow opened up in the corridor packed with students, allowing him to pass through. Everyone watched Ye Chong respectfully, since those who were truly capable were often respected.

Rui Su had fought for this opportunity and would not miss it for the life of hers. She skipped to the front of Ye Chong, putting the most mesmerising smile on her face and smiled charmingly at Ye Chong, "How do you do? Welcome to Blue Ocean Academy! I'm the assistant dean for the faculty of broadcasting, Rui Su, we'll be colleagues from now on!" Her usual crisp voice was now as seductive as melted chocolate, rich and sweet! Ye Chong could hear the heart beats of the corridor's spectators throb more loudly in response!

Ye Chong, however, was shocked! As the lady had skipped to get in front of him, her control of movement and strength were impeccable, indicating that the other party was highly skilled in battle.

Ye Chong took a half step back, keeping a wider distance between himself and the opponent. He was now on full alert, even if his expression changed not at all! Ye Chong's right hand was now positioned to strike when necessary, and his whole body was relaxed but focused, anticipating a battle!

Ye Chong understood from his days here that the outside world was no trash planet, and while both environments ultimately involve physical combat, the outside world required more tact and cunningness!

Ye Chong replied coldly, "How do you do?" All the students in the

corridor heard Ye Chong's voice for the first time. His baritone voice exuded a certain chill, but also brought a unique quality to it. This won the astonished gasp of a few female students.

Ye Chong observed with the intensity of a blade's edge, scanning over Rui Su's physique. Rui Su only felt a chill overcoming her, and could not help but hug herself a little. Her pitiful expression affected a round of gasps from the corridor, as the male students watched on with their mouths wide open.

Ye Chong was as still as a rock.

"Mm, her hands are overly fair, and skin too delicate, with almost no signs of training. Her fighting skills must be extremely poor." Ye Chong believed that, with only one punch on whichever part of the lady's figure, she would definitely be smashed into pieces! However, her demonstration of speed and control over her strength was impressive, and Ye Chong would not dare to underestimate her.

Of all his skills, mech piloting was definitely the one that Ye Chong was best at. It was also his specialty and the one skill he was most confident in. In second place was mech mechanics, which he had improved in leaps and bounds due his experience under the tutelage of the elderlies at Aurora and his constant discussions with Mu and Shang. Battling only came in at third place! Ye Chong's battling skills were mainly the result of his experience fighting against wild animals and some low level training at Black Cove. He was not exactly skillful in combat. However, if he were to be engaged in a battle of life and death, Ye Chong would probably be the last man standing. Even without any battling techniques, his inhuman strength and speed would more than make up for his ability to harm the enemy.

However, Ye Chong understood that if his opponent was not much slower than him, with technique based battling skills, he would not stand a chance! In Black Cove, Ye Chong had seen Instructor Hak's impressive battling techniques, and while

Instructor Hak's strength and speed were far inferior to his own, Ye Chong was not certain of his odds against someone with such unpredictable techniques!

Speed and strength were like the opposites of battle techniques, the two of them balancing a scale through a mysterious relationship!

Her arms and legs seemed too thin - without strength, any technique would only be as useless as decorations!

In reality, Ye Chong was not aware that he had a few misconceptions regarding some general knowledge. He did not realise that the person before him was a woman. More accurately speaking, he did not know the difference between men and women, and had often compared his enemy with himself, unaware of the fact that he was actually more like a monster amongst the commoners!

Rui Su was also not feeling as calm as her expression suggested. Ye Chong's calculating stare had put a chill down her spine, as though he could see through all her thoughts and actions. Ye Chong's minor retreat and his hands' posture and position also surprised her. While the students would not understand them, how could she not? Her upbringing in a battle-centric family made her familiar with this kind of posture.

Suddenly, even being surrounded by so many people, Rui Su did not feel safe at all, as though she had plunged into an icy cave. "If only my younger sister were here!" Rui Su thought to herself.

Ye Chong studied Rui Su for a moment, before easily gliding past her like a breeze.

Rui Su, however, felt terror under the predatory scrutiny of Ye Chong. An insuppressible chill engulfed her from head to toe, freezing her stiff!

For the nearby students, it was an extremely odd sight to behold!

At first, the Witch had disguised as an angel and extended an olive branch for Ye Chong. Then, Ye Chong returned the favour with a cold greeting. After a prolonged staring contest between them, Ye Chong gave the Witch a purposeful look before moving past her without a word.

Something strange was going on between them!

This conclusion was shared by all the spectators, and even Headmaster Lan directed a strange look at Rui Su!

Wang Xiao Er did not move the camera away from the two since the very beginning, and the odd scene was broadcasted to the entire academy! Since there were many students interested in Ye Chong's candidacy as Blue Ocean Academy's teacher, they were all watching the live broadcast on their holographic screens. As such, the entire scene was presented to their very eyes!

"Could the two have known each other before? Were there any unresolved tension between them?" Rumours full of imagination began to spread throughout the Blue Ocean Academy.

In the academic column, there was "Conversation Between Geniuses and the Hidden Messages Behind Them"; in the academy's entertainment news section, there was "Past Lovers, Present Adversaries"; in the opinion's column, there was "May-December Relationships As I See It" ...

In an instant, the academy grounds were in an uproar. Ye Chong and the Witch became wildly infamous. The female students were all deeply regretful that someone as steady and cool as Ye Chong was no longer available. Who would have thought that the Witch had made the first move? It was a depressing thought. The male students, however, thought it was hilarious. How could anyone dominate the Witch? Wasn't that Heaven's blessings? They hoped that Teacher Ye Chong would conquer the Witch, and prevent her from spreading any more suffering! Their days of hardship would finally be over! This was the primary concern for the male students



under the faculty of broadcasting!

Unfortunately, Ye Chong was not aware of his role in the grand scheme of things. While the academy had provided him comfortable accommodation, Ye Chong would still make time every day to visit Grandpa Qian's shop, and also inspect if Ye's automatic noodle making machine was in good condition!

As for Rui Su, she was furious and exasperated at home, but there was nothing she could do!

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At the Ji family's place.

Elder Ji's profile had touch of saintliness and godhood, and now it held a terrifying sombre expression!

No one below dared to make a sound.

Only Ji Shangyan was calmly reporting, "Based on our last inventory check after the incident, the Harmony of the Winter Aria was stolen. There are 26 casualties in total. The base had suffered unprecedented damages, and during our last inventory check, we found that an unknown ore was missing!"

"Unknown ore?" Elder Ji asked in his low voice.

"Yes. This unknown ore was obtained by accident, and sent to the base for research. Until the day of the incident, our research was still inconclusive. During the research of the unknown ore, we were able to establish that the ore could significantly increase a variety of physical properties of alloy materials. We had mixed in a very small amount of the unknown ore into the tip of the lance belonging to the Harmony of the Winter Aria! After examination, as expected, the tip of the lance had astounding properties. We were ready for further research when the mech was stolen!"

Elder Ji muttered, "Do you think the intruder was coming after the ore?"

Ji Shangyan replied respectfully, "Yes, your grandson believes so!" Ji family's eldest young master was still in shock, and currently undergoing treatment. Thus, it was up to Ji Shangyan to manage affairs.

Ji Shangyan threw a quick glance at Elder Ji's expression, and continued, "Fortunately, the red-silver mech was untouched!" Elder Ji's expression smoothened at that.

"While we were cleaning up the base, we also found a mech's wreckage. Even though the mech underwent a strong explosion, and its main structures were damaged, we still found that the mech's armour workmanship was a lot better than our family's red-silver mech and the Harmony of the Winter Aria!" Ji Shangyan obtained a palm-sized fragment of the mech from an employee behind him.

When Elder Ji saw the polished black fragment, his expression twisted, and he asked anxiously, "Is the mech's pilot still here? Dead or alive?"

Ji Shangyan shook his head. "He is dead. We found nothing of value on this person, only a broken mask of sorts, and that mask was already partly melted!"

Elder Ji gave a wave with his hand and urged, "Bring that mask to me now!"

Ji Shangyan noted his grandfather's expression uncertainly, but still ordered someone to retrieve what was left of the mask, which was just a small part of the whole.

Elder Ji held the distorted mask tightly in his grip, his expression changing curiously. After a moment, he settled down but did not speak further.

Could it be that the old man knew where the thing came from?

Ji Shangyan gave another quick glance at Elder Ji's face, thought for a moment, before bracing himself and continuing carefully,

"Grandfather, there's one more thing!"

Elder Ji frowned. "What is it?"

## Chapter 84: First Day in Class

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Ji Shangyan deliberated for a moment before continuing, "What surprised us the most was that our alarm system was completely compromised by the intruder. There is no chance of restoring it, and we have to reinstall the entire system! The alarm system was not effective at all against the intruder, and up till now we have no idea of their methods. We have no clue at all. The intruder's photon processor must be far ahead of ours."

Ji Shangyan finished his report nervously, anticipating the old man's outrage. However, the moment did not come, as the old man observed the black fragment with a complicated expression. He sighed softly, "Hmmm, you're still young, ignorant of the world outside your own. There are many things out there you can't even imagine!"

Ji Shangyan was startled, staring at the old man with disbelief.

The old man looked desolate, his usual edge gone without a trace, leaving only signs of living through decades of his life, with a slightly hunched back. The man before Ji Shangyan now looked just like an ordinary old man!

Ji Shangyan felt overwhelmed by the sight, his tears fighting to escape his eyes.

Elder Ji waved his hand and spoke, "Alright, leave me!"

At the Luo family, Luo Heng had finished listening to Luo Ren's report, his face grave. He asked lowly, "Are you sure?"

After the incident from last time, the Luo family had suffered greatly, but the aristocratic family's history extended centuries, if not, millennias into the past. So long as the family had not fallen, a little catalyst would be sufficient to reinvigorate the family's situation. The Luo family had recovered under Luo Heng's leadership, resuming their swift progression. Luo Heng had

recognised Luo Ren's outstanding capabilities, and so Luo Ren had become one of his competent underlings.

Luo Ren responded respectfully, "This servant has confirmed that the information is entirely accurate!"

Luo Heng's long and slender fingers tapped rhythmically against the tabletop. He lifted his head abruptly towards Luo Ren. "What are your thoughts on the matter?"

Luo Ren spoke without hesitation, "The Ji family have always been famous for their photon processors. To be stripped of their reputation so horrifyingly, I believe the effects are not insignificant! We had never been able to infiltrate that base of theirs, only placing a few of our own around the base. However, the extent of the damage this time was unexpectedly massive! We were able to send a few in amidst the chaos to gather some important intel! To be humiliated to this extent, the Ji family will probably make their move soon!"

Luo Heng nodded, agreeing to his assessment. "That's right. With a temperament like Ji family's old man, they will probably retaliate! However, who were the intruders? How could they have best the Ji family's photon processors?"

The two thought over the matter intently, and suddenly, as though they had figured something out, both looked towards each other, their eyes filled with astonishment! Could it be ...

---

Blue Ocean Academy's MP Games finally came to an end, and life in the academy resumed its usual routines. The new batch of students this year included quite a few outstanding freshmen, and possibly even geniuses amongst them, as was typical for the academy. However, the attention they received were incomparable to that of the past few batches. This was all due to Ye Chong's presence.

Ye Chong had garnered the attention of everyone around!

His outstanding performance at the MP games earlier had dimmed the significance of all his opponents. After his stunt, rumours of some complicated relationship between Ye Chong and Rui Su had permeated to all corners of the academy's grounds, inviting everyone's attention. Ye Chong had become Blue Ocean Academy's center of attention!

This was Ye Chong's first time teaching in class. Of course, he had rehearsed with Shang a few times beforehand, and did not expect any issues!

Blue Ocean Academy had constructed its school grounds in the virtual world. Teaching here was convenient, especially for accessing various information databases. Geographical barriers were also no longer relevant!

Ever since Ye Chong was granted permission by Headmaster Lan to use the academy's most advanced modification workshop, he had been spending most of his time there, enjoying the facilities with Shang. While Shang's calculations were not as impressive as Mu's, they were still very powerful calculations, and even someone with Ye Chong's calibre of mediocre calculations could appreciate them. Materials were freely provided as Ye Chong requested, since Headmaster Lan had explicitly allowed him so.

Shang reminded Ye Chong, "Ye, it's time for your class! Almost time now!"

Ye Chong lifted his head, noticed the clock's reading and agreed. He picked up the virtual world hyperlink helmet prepared earlier and hyperlinked to the virtual world.

Shang could not stop blabbering, "Ye, hehe, the gossip about you and that Rui Su is really taking a life of its own, but, Ye, this Rui Su is definitely a first class beauty, perhaps, you would consider?"

Ye Chong replied lightly, "Shang, this is the twenty fourth time

you've brought this up in the last 3 days, do you really want me to repeat my answer?"

"Ye, hehe, I have all the information on Rui Su, if you want them, don't be shy to ask!" Shang let out a long, weird laugh.

Ye Chong felt helpless. Shang seemed to grow more and more active, and Ye Chong was often at a loss to deal with him. What a troubling companion!

"I wonder how Mu is doing?" Ye Chong was beginning to miss the reserved and calm Mu!

After a few rounds of identity authentication, Ye Chong was quickly on his way into the classroom. The security was to prevent unauthorised substitution of the teacher and as a timestamp for the teacher's teaching hours. Of course, the level of identity authentication did not escape Shang's litany of condescending remarks!

All students had to go through similar identity authentication measures. When class began, the system would automatically deny further access to anyone else. This was especially painful for the serial latecomers! Attendance was also an important part of the academy's official assessment for students.

Blue Ocean Academy's learning style was flexible, and every student could choose their courses freely, if they could pass their final year overall assessment.

The virtual world's classroom was spacious, but the ordinary rules of space did not apply here. Every student had their own individual space, and Ye Chong would appear before every one of them. As for Ye Chong, his view was quite different. Ye Chong could only see many dots of light before him, not a single person in sight. He could, however, communicate with the students via controls.

Ye Chong steadily walked to the teacher's podium.

Since students were free to choose their courses, there were close to ten thousand students who were now attending this class, making up a fiftieth of the academy's total student population. However, Ye Chong was unfazed.

After all, he could only see dots of light before him. Who would be afraid of dots of lights?

Class began.

Ye Chong's low and slightly cold voice rang clearly in the ears of the students. Ye Chong spoke concisely and confidently, without much intonation, and the students who had grown used to lively teachers in class felt that it was a very different experience.

However, Ye Chong's deep knowledge and strong theoretical foundation won the hearts of the students. At Aurora, the elderlies had often began with simple problems as a beginning to illustrate deeper insights, slowly approaching the core of the knowledge involved. This process of deepening knowledge was often the most effective!

Ye Chong used this method as well. As he unravelled deeper and deeper insights, the students became more and more impressed. However, Ye Chong could not see them. With Shang's help, Ye Chong made full use of the advantages offered by the virtual classroom. Multitudes of holographic images, statistics and graphs often appeared with little effort on his part.

The entire classroom was amazed by the massive amount of information!

Information, charts and other material used in class must be prepared beforehand. Teacher Ye would be so diligent in his job, it was not expected - how can any student not develop a favourable impression of him? The students, ignorant of Ye Chong's background, began to look at him in a better light!

However, despite his favourable impression, the content of the



class was still technical and deep. Those who could not keep up would only feel bored and began to doze off.

Of all the students present, only a select few of them were under the faculty of mech mechanics. Most of them were here for Ye Chong, and not for his teaching session, but for the twenty-minute exchange session with the teacher that was part of each class.

Ye Chong kept his cool expression throughout the class, an eye candy to the female students.

Soon, it was time for the exchange session!

Ye Chong began, "Anyone has any questions?"

Almost all the light dots before him began to flash. Despite his bravery, Ye Chong still felt a little queasy.

After he calmed himself down, Ye Chong pressed on a random light dot. The dot immediately expanded, and Ye Chong could see the student clearly, a female student.

The female student must not have expected herself to be so luckily chosen, and froze on the spot, uttering a few false starts but not knowing what to say!

Ye Chong decisively terminated the student's channel without a word!

Ye Chong slowly scanned across the light dots, and spoke coldly, "Don't ask questions if you don't have them prepared!" While this was the virtual world, Ye Chong's icy, cutting gaze and chilling words made all the students felt chilled to the bone. Everyone paused with their hands on the controls. The ten-thousand strong classroom was put into a mental freeze by Ye Chong for a few seconds, none of the dots flashing.

Shang spoke in Ye Chong's mind, unimpressed, "Ye, you'll scare away the pretty girls!"

Ye Chong, "All for the better!"

After a moment of awkward silence, almost all the lights began flashing again!

Ye Chong ignored Shang and pressed on another light dot.

It was a male student this time, and he was obviously calmer than the female student earlier. He asked enthusiastically, "How do you do, Teacher Ye, I am a student of the mech pilot's faculty. I'd like to ask Teacher Ye, how can the speed of hand movement be significantly increased? And did you, Teacher Ye, train yourself?"

Ye Chong replied flatly, "Training, continuous training. As for my training methods, not sharing!" His method was taught by Mu, and without Mu's permission, he would not teach it to anyone else. As for whatever he learnt in Black Cove, Ye Chong did not dare teach them, as it would greatly increase the chances of Black Cove discovering him! Even though the chances of being discovered now was already quite high!

The male student who asked the question could not help but express his disdain. "I didn't think Teacher Ye is the kind of person who would keep their knowledge to themselves! Hmph, I guess I misjudged you!"

Ye Chong replied with indifference, "You definitely misjudged me!" and switched off his channel without waiting for a reply. What did his misjudgment have anything to do with himself? Ye Chong could not care less.

"I am only a teacher for the faculty of mech mechanics, and responsible for answering only questions related to mech mechanics!" Ye Chong blankly declared his rule.

This triggered another round of awkward silence!

# Chapter 85: Rui Bing

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Ye Chong's first day of class made him a controversial teacher. He was a point of contention, inviting feelings of disdain, admiration, disgust, respect ... All held different views against him. However, everyone had agreed on one thing, and that was Ye Chong's coldness! His was not the kind put up for show, but an authentic coldness that brought chills to the bone! Almost everyone believed that, should Ye Chong be angry, the consequences would be very serious!

As for Ye Chong's knowledge, none doubted his authenticity! Ye Chong may speak concisely, but his flow was natural, and the teaching material was rich, almost enough to make the diligent teachers be embarrassed of themselves!

For the moment, aside from his punctual visit to Grandpa Qian every day, Ye Chong would spend the rest of his time in the modification workshop. As for sleep, the workshop was more comfortable than his home on the trash planet!

Ye Chong looked at the Harmony of the Winter Aria, modified beyond recognition, impossible to be associated with its former majestic blue and ivory white appearance! The greenish grey hull made the Harmony of the Winter Aria look insignificant. Ye Chong added a little more changes to the double-folded wings, and the Harmony was completely different from its former self. Even Ye Chong, as the Harmony's user, could not tell that they were one and the same. Ye Chong believed that the mech would be recognizable in its current form. He examined the photon circuits again in great detail, and did not find anything amiss.

Shang had continuously mumbled that the colours were too ugly, but Ye Chong completely ignored the Shang.

Rui Su stayed in her house, full of anger. "That d\*mn Ye Chong, how could he make a fool of this old lady?" The thought of Ye

Chong made her even more furious. Rui Su hugged her pillow tightly, indignant of the matter, but was helpless against Ye Chong. The thought of Ye Chong's eyes, icy cold and lifeless, spread a chill within her. She had a hunch that, should she insist on meddling with him, there was a distinct possibility that Ye Chong could kill her. The thought was frightening, and kept her against any further actions.

Her mother's voice came from the kitchen. "Su Su, go get your younger sister from the training grounds for dinner. That little b\*tch, she is just like her father, can't remember anything during her practice! Su Su, go get her now!"

Rui Su's eyes brightened at that. "Okay!" she replied before rushing out of the house.

The training ground for Rui Su's family was more than ten kilometers away from their house. The Rui family's training ground enjoyed a small reputation in Jesha. While wrestling was no longer widely practiced, it was still far from retiring into history. The rising popularity of mechs had slowly undermined the status of wrestlers, but there was still a minority persistent in keeping the legacy alive. Wrestling was also a necessary skill for jobs in security, such as bodyguards and escorts.

Rui Su's father lost in a wrestling match 3 years ago, and had shortly passed away due to prolonged depression and accompanying illness. The training ground was then passed on to Rui Su's younger sister, Rui Bing. True to her name, Rui Bing was as beautiful as she was cold [1]. Moreover, her lifelong wrestling practice due to her upbringing had developed a strong killer's aura around her. No one dared to step within two meters around her, except for Rui Su and their mother.

After Rui Bing defeated the opponent who bested her father 3 years ago, none were brave enough to challenge her again. Rui Bing's reputation grew more prominent in Jesha, directly increasing the number of students of their family dojo. Hence, Rui

Bing had to spend more time at the dojo every day.

In reality, with the Rui family's financial state, Rui Bing did not have to run any dojo at all. The passing of Rui Su's father had left a dark shadow in the hearts of Rui Su and her mother, and both had hoped that Rui Bing would give up the dojo. However, Rui Bing was very insistent, unmoved by their pleading, and so Rui Su and her mother had let her be.

A ten-kilometer journey was only a short trip with a mech. Rui Su slipped out of the mech easily, her graceful landing gathering the attention of the students at the dojo. However, none dared to approach her, for she was in many ways more terrifying than the master of the dojo.

Rui Su withdrew her mech and rushed into the dojo, greeting the students as she passed by, "Give it your all in training guys, and Sister will get you sweets later!" Her honeyed smile would have stolen the breaths of the ignorant, but these dojo students avoided her like the plague. Rui Su's laughter rang like windchimes, trailing her as she rushed into the dojo's inner grounds.

Rui Bing's tall and slender physique was currently in a cross-legged sitting position, her long, black hair flowing down to her lower back like a waterfall. With her eyes closed, her exquisite profile was similar to Rui Su's. She had sharp, thin eyebrows, and her pinkish lips were now closed into a line. Her white training garb added a handsome quality to Rui Bing. Jade white hands with long, slender fingers half extended beyond the loose garb, perched naturally on her knees.

Rui Su gave a jubilant cheer before throwing herself onto her younger sister. Rui Bing had already noticed her presence since Rui Su entered the room. She opened her eyes, watching her elder sister on her, and gave a helpless smile. The room instantly brightened up, as though a winter flower had blossomed into a spectacular wonder!

"Now who's the elder sister, and who's the younger one?" Rui Bing must have thought so to herself.

Rui Su grinned widely as she hugged Rui Bing by the neck, and spoke warmly, "Sis, mum's asking us to get back for dinner! She even called you a crazy b\*tch, hee ..."

If Blue Ocean Academy's students were to witness this scene, they might have all dropped their jaw and fainted!

Rui Bing answered, "Oh," before standing up in a smooth motion, oblivious to Rui Su's weight.

As for Rui Su, she hung on tightly to Rui Bing like a koala. Rui Bing was obviously used to that, and did not feel uncomfortable.

Before they left the room, Rui Su hopped down and stuck out her tongue, speaking mischievously, "Heehee, can't let them see this, if not, your elder sister's going to lose face!"

Rui Bing affected an expression that meant she knew that as well!

Rui Su knew that her younger sister, obsessed with the martial arts, was a very traditional person. She had obeyed all the traditions strictly, and resisted modernisation. She even avoided mechs and walked home every day.

In the dining room, Rui Bing sat straight, in full solemnity, while Rui Su was lazily half stretched across the table, with no grace to speak of. As their mother went to get the dishes, Rui Su slid closer to Rui Bing's side and spoke charmingly, "Bing Bing, I'm bullied at the academy! Bing Bing, you got to help me!"

Rui Bing replied lightly, "No!" She understood her elder sister very well, including her nickname as the Witch of the academy. "Heh, it's fine if the Witch doesn't go around messing people, who'd invite trouble upon themselves and mess with the Witch?" thought Rui Bing.

Rui Si explained with a furious undertone "It's that Ye Chong, that horrible guy!" Rui Su shook Rui Bing's shoulders, tears almost

escaping her eyes. "That guy's new to the academy, and the first thing he did is bully me, and I can't win against him, sob, dearest Bing Bing, you can't let me be bullied like this!"

Rui Bing watched her elder sister skeptically.

Rui Su cried as she explained further, "That guy's amazing! He's so fast I can't even see him move!" Rui Bing grew attentive at that, her fighting instincts instantly awoken. In the past 2 years, Rui Bing did not meet any worthy challenger, and one with her level of skills would not be able to improve without real combat experience! As for her elder sister's insights, Rui Bing still trusted them. Rui Su was more talented than her in martial arts when they were young, but her sister had stopped practicing later on due to a lack of interest. Their father had been unhappy with her decision for a long time. Even so, her elder sister's skills were better than an average person's, and if she could not win against someone, then the other party must be on par with a martial arts practitioner!

Seeing her elder sister's fighting instincts invigorated, Rui Su was secretly pleased, and continued, "Dearest Bing Bing, he bullied me right in front of everyone else, you must make him pay for this! Dearest Bing Bing, please!" Rui Su implored endearingly.

Rui Bing hesitated, but in the end yielded to her elder sister and nodded in assent!

"Yay!" Rui Su cheered, her arms raised, the tears that once clouded her eyes vanished in an instant. Her glorious smiling face was now without a trace of her previous pitifulness!

Rui Bing could not help but roll her eyes, knowing exactly that this would happen!

Rui Su grinned to herself. She knew that once her younger sister promised something to her, she would definitely keep it!

Rui Su and Rui Bing walked side by side in the Blue Ocean Academy grounds. The duo of beautiful ladies, one flirtatious,

another as cold as ice, together as a contrasting existence, turned heads wherever it went.

Rui Bing's thoroughly white training garb was eye-catching in particular.

The two ladies were not affected in the least by the attention they gathered. For Rui Su, Blue Ocean Academy was her territory, why would she be intimidated? As for Rui Bing, she would probably not even cower before a crumbling mountain, much less in an insignificant situation like this! Their ease with the situation made them look extra confident with themselves.

At Blue Ocean Academy's modification workshop 1, so-called Blue Ocean Academy's most advanced modification workshop. The person in charge of the workshop looked at the Witch, instantly terrified. The Witch was still an influential person, the most intimidating person to most, but the headmaster had placed great trust in her. Now that she had asked to enter the workshop, how could he refuse? Besides, Ye Chong was still inside. The rumours running in the academy about the two were numerous, and perhaps the Witch was here on a date. If he interrupted them, he might just be in for some horrible consequences!

The person in charge could see that something was amiss, and immediately left the workshop!

Rui Su and Rui Bing moved into the modification workshop with overbearing confidence!



## Chapter 86: Ow That Hurt

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Ye Chong sensed their intrusion the moment they stepped into his workshop.

He did not seem to have the habit of being reckless even in his own proximity. He sprung from his seat, his eyes fixed on the intruders. His sight detected 2 females in his place - one whom he had met before while the other was a total stranger. "A total stranger" sounded alarming to his senses.

He carried on observing, which later he identified that the stranger was exceptionally calm in her pace, as every step she treaded had the exact same distance between each other. It looked like even her footsteps were carefully schemed. "Now, Ye," Shang withdrew his usual joking self. "That's an adept you've just encountered!" his words fell grimly.

Rui Bing's upper body stood still like a stone, while her steps laid like the flow of the wind, fluid and seamless like a unique rhythm of beauty.

Ye Chong squinted his eyes and took a cautious look as his feet adjusting themselves subconsciously, adapting to the opponent's moves, becoming the phantom that shrouded within.

He knew he would be in hot water anytime soon. He could sense the danger for real this time! His instinct wielded him like a beast, sensible and sensitive. A trustworthy ability he had that never failed him before. His body reformed its stance accordingly, all by his intuition. He turned to his side slightly, with his left hand raised to his chest and the right hand lowered.

There was nothing strange going on with that girl... other than the marks she probably got from harsh training on her hands. She looked like an ordinary girl at first glance. However, in that ordinariness Ye Chong could smell the hazard within. And she was a danger indeed!

The eagle eyes of Ye Chong seemed to have frightened Rui Su peeking at the side, as she staggered. Rui Bing's stare sparkled. It was undeniable that she had caught Ye Chong's attention successfully, especially when Ye Chong began shifting stance like a phantom. She almost shuddered but fortunately her strong mentality kept her expression from changing. Her cheeks quivered a little over the endurance yet she morphed her stance along, as if it was synched with Ye Chong's thoughts. Each of her lift was raised in huge curves, vicious like the storm!

They stared at each other, standing still.

Rui Su was feeling a little regretful of her immature decision. She hid at the corner, wondering if she was doing too much this time. "Well, just wait till Bing Bing gets you. It's just a tiny punishment for your misconduct. Mhm, yes," she comforted herself by pulling off some cheap rationale.

There was barely a hush between them.

Rui Bing knew her action was considered a taunt. It was the typical trouble-making move to begin with and that did not require any excuse to reason its motive.

On the other hand, Ye Chong preferred saving his words. If you want to fight, just carry on fighting. Fighting did not require any reason either, just like how he hunted those Engulfers back on his planet. Also, he would be more likely to win a silent war.

Stared on, his sight grew colder, like a tempest on the tip of an iceberg it raided the entire workshop. He froze his position, like a statue of ice breathing menacing frigidity. Rui Bing's long hair waved along with her training robe. The ice in her eyes melted and instead they burned brightly, like a searing chariot awaiting to be launched.

A picture of killing spree flashed in Ye Chong's squinted eyes. The opponent had shown blatant hostility, which initiated Ye Chong's self-defense mechanism. The strong sense of danger had

awakened his defense. Every faint bit of the norms he learned in this reality was scrapped in his mind.

The miniature expression did not go unnoticed among the girls. Rui Su, the smart one already knew what would happen next. Her face drained. "He would not be letting it go this easily," she thought and panicked.

Rui Bing was more sensible than her sister. She had felt the homicidal desire a moment earlier. But she reacted fearlessly as the confidence in herself found her bravery towards the enemy. The faith boiling in a well-trained fighter like her was unbeatable!

"Hmph!" At the tip of his toes, countless afterimages traced his movements as he jumped at Rui Bing. Always be the first one to launch the attack - that was the belief imprinted deep in his marrows and it would not be changed merely because the opponent happened to be a female!

The speed was totally uncalled for to Rui Bing, while Rui Su almost burst into shrieks upon his attack.

There was no letup from Ye Chong. All force applied! His inhuman movement speed was demonstrated for the first time in front of the girls. Their hearts skipped a beat, as they realized it was not only Ye Chong's hands held an immense speed, but also his entire body.

Rui Bing nearly failed to react in time as she backed off only when Ye Chong's hand was barely a few centimeters away from her throat. It was way beyond her prediction of his speed, which eventually shut off her activity.

Ye Chong pulled away his right hand while his left hand landed like a meteor mash right onto Rui Bing's chest. Without a doubt, if that fist were to land, it would even break a metallic alloy gate of 20 centimeters breadth.

Rui Bing responded with dexterity as her right arm went wide

and bent, her fingers spread, holding Ye Chong's heavy blow with her palm. Wham! Ye Chong was expecting bones-shattering, flesh-bursting yet none of those happened. Ye Chong flinched.

That was a mighty blow from Ye Chong. Rui Bing managed to prepare herself in time for the punch but she was still pushed way back behind. She was not an amateur after all as she backed away sliding, instead of falling down and rolling.

What a mighty power! Rui Bing's heart turned cold. She could no longer feel her right arm. She did not see that strength coming. She could not believe that her arm was crippled in one fist. That thing... That thing is a monster! She thought.

Ye Chong halted a moment then curved his body, he leapt forward and started dashing towards Rui Bing.

As Ye Chong grew closer in Rui Bing's eyes, though her arm was temporarily disabled, there was no fright in her expression.

Her eyes blinked with caution as she straightened her hand into a blade. She raised it up.

Ye Chong was shocked by this unexpected change.

Rui Bing raised her right palm solemnly.

Ye Chong, body and soul, was attracted to this raising palm of hers for some reason. It was as if the palm was the center of the universe and the universe revolved around it as it raised.

It was like a blazing sun.

The surrounding turned slow. It was an ominous feeling right into Ye Chong's abdomen, a major discomfort into his soul, that he almost felt like spurting his internal body. He tried speeding up but he could not. It was like he got thrown into a pool of sticky liquid, his chain of action turned extremely sluggish yet he knew extremely clear that he was mesmerized by that glaring palm of holiness, somewhat and somehow! He lost control over his body gradually that even the slightest gesture he wanted to make was

more lethargic than usual. He slowly flew towards that palm, like a moth into the fire.

Nevertheless, that overwhelming sense of danger lingered in his mind. He wanted to struggle but he failed miserably. Like a fish in the net stranding between the threads, it only grew tighter and his muscles were no longer in his control. Approaching the palm, he could not do a thing.

I could not just die here.

Not just yet!

The tenacity to live on, the strong desire for survival, Ye Chong endeavored with the last bit of senses he had.

In the midst of his endeavor he bit his tongue. The intense pain woke him from the illusions. The sharp taste of his blood rekindled his will to battle. He screamed on top of his lungs. His wave collided with the restriction enveloping him.

That's it! He squirmed vigorously and he regained his control over his body little by little.

And that was the moment he realized in his horror, that he was very much close to the range of her attack. The palm slammed downwards after being raised to the highest. Her beautiful hand actually created screeches of a blade shredding the air.

There was no time to figure out the hows and whys. Ye Chong held the slashing palm with his right fist!

Klink!

Crack!

It felt like punching an actual blade on his fist. His fingers were utterly painful like they had been ground. There was a stark mark of dent on his fist. Ye Chong hissed in torment. He thought he might have already broken his fingers.

Rui Bing was not feeling well either. It was an iron blade colliding

with an iron fist. She suffered more damage than Ye Chong at this strike in reality. Her face became pale as blood drained abruptly. Her heart beat in a squeeze. Her face then reddened dramatically as if she was drunk. The blood surged through the veins in her face hurriedly. The vermilion streaks over her fair skin, an unidentifiable beauty it had, unexplainably charming it was for some reason!

But any charm could not infatuate Ye Chong by then.

Ye Chong raised his brows as he knew he got the upper hand in this. Certainly he would deliver the last hit and end this fight once and for all. He spread fingers of his left hand and propelled immediately like lightning right towards Rui Bing's chest. With his strength, one last pierce, then Rui Bing would stay here for life with the 5 pores on the chest of hers! If that counted that is.

"Stop!" Rui Su's voice went wild as she witnessed the scene. Remorse pulled her into the bottomless pit of guilt. Her tears overflowed the corner of her eyes, as they fell like pearls off the string, right onto the ground.

No use! I am so going to kill this girl!

Ye Chong turned a deaf ear to her plea. He made up his mind - he must kill the girl before him today for she almost murdered him in the first place! There would be no way for him to let her go, especially after that odd skill she used on him! He could not swear if he could make it this way the next time he met her. If he did not bite his tongue back then, he would have been dead.

Frankly speaking, it was all a big misunderstanding between them. Rui Bing sought fights, not murders. She and her sister were more bounded by the rules and regulations of this world than Ye Chong himself. It was preposterous for her to commit homicide at such a whim. And it was wrong for Ye Chong to judge people his way. Literally wrong!

The logic behind Rui Bing's hindering reaction was because of

the killing will inside Ye Chong that she sensed. The palm was raised out of her desperation for survival. The force exerted was a result of the outburst on her capability.

The senses on her right hand finally recovered. At this dead-or-alive moment she backed off fast. She had to do it! While biting her teeth she forced her right arm up, wanting to catch Ye Chong's incoming left hand. But all she caught was the arm of his, not the hand.

She could not be bothered as she grabbed his arm forcefully. She was not letting go and was tossed to his back by the inertia.

Ye Chong had already hit the bottom of his vitality. The struggle moments ago consumed most of his stamina and was exhausting his mind as well. Thanks to the blade to the fist strike with Rui Bing before, his right hand was still flabbily crippled.

His fingers were buried in her breasts. He noticed he could not penetrate further as Rui Bing held his arm frantically.

As he ran out of strength, he decided to grab her breasts instead of penetrating.

Incredible! His fingers felt tender as he touched. Such a great fighter yet the pectoral muscle was so soft. Impossible! The statement filled his mind as he pinched twice purposely to justify that he was not having a delusion.

Strange... If she could take my attack before this, her body should be more than just "well-built".

Rui Bing's body hardened from the touch.

Ye Chong gripped her breasts; disregarding the moans she made, he made a turn and flung her out.

# Chapter 87: Trial and Tribulation

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Ye Chong discovered that his seemingly infinite stamina was not truly infinite after all. His endurance might not be boundless but at least it should not decrease this fast! Ye Chong was thoroughly exhausted for the first time in his adventure. That weird technique used by the enemy depleted every ounce of his vitality. He was drained not only on the outside, but also the inside. His brain felt emptied, as if he was about to get brainwashed or something. Twinge reverberated waves by waves inside his head.

Oww... Is that what Mu defined as a psychic attack?

All words from Mu were precious lectures. They were not as trivial as Shang's. They were very much applicable in his combats. So he would remember them to heart every time. He was not seeing a psychic attack from a girl. It altered Ye Chong's concept of combats downright.

"Oh Ye. Tsk, tsk, tsk." Rui Bing was thrown away like a bag of trash. Shang showed up in his mind upon discerning the turnabout in the situation, "You never learn how to take lasses the gentle way. Mhm, so how did they feel in your hands? Man, Ye, you are despicable. But, being handsy is the right way to start off dealing with lasses. Kekeke!" Shang let off a round of distorted giggle.

Ye Chong's eyes were locating where Rui Bing fell. He did not listen to Shang at all. He was trying to catch a breather while recovering his health as much as possible. Ye Chong was beyond under the weather at this point - it was under the drain! Tides of fatigue and soreness gushing at him one after another. Ye Chong's fortress of inner peace was crumpling! Ye Chong held still.

One more... Just one more blow... One last blow, then I could... I could finish her.

Ye Chong was mumbling as he tried hypnotizing himself. His vision began turning indistinct. The sleeves of Rui Bing's training



robe were fluttering white like the clouds in the sky, which he could not reach as they flew farther.

He forced his eyes open, yet the lids were so heavy that he could not hold. His consciousness felt as if it was ripped away from his body. His remaining senses could not control his body effectively. His stance shook and he almost fell. Ye Chong had never felt this weak before! His body was inhumanly overpowered yet it could not sustain a little longer when he gravely needed it. The emptied brain of Ye Chong felt like shutting down on its own. He could sleep the moment he closed his eyes.

I... I must not.

Ye Chong's conviction was howling at him not to sleep, as the enemy was still right there, right in front of him. He would be dead, if he slept; or he would sleep only if he was dead!

"Ye! Please!" Shang sensed the casualty in Ye Chong as he shouted in his mind fretfully, "Lie down already! The ladies won't kill you! Stop holding it! You have overused your mentality! Your brainwaves are fluctuating! Just have a nap! Come on! Quick! Stop manning up! It will hurt you!"

Rui Su at one corner tipped her toes on a mech passing by. She soared to Rui Su like an eagle. Grounded clumsily, she regained her balance. She lifted Rui Su and scurried out of the workshop after that.

Ye Chong's blurry vision could slightly spot a cloud hovering out of his workshop.

Ugh...

Thup! Being unable to stand the tiredness anymore, he fell onto the ground and went into deep slumber after.

After exiting the workshop with her sister by her side, Rui Bing's frail body collapsed. Fortunately, Rui Su reacted in time to grab her sister's body. By then her younger sister no longer appeared to

be that tough Wonder Woman she used to see in her daily life. She was merely a poor little girl in injury. It was heart-wrenching for her to see her sister in such a devastated state.

On the way to the hospital, she looked at her sister in dismay. Her fingers helplessly caressed that pretty face of hers in faint warmth. Impatiently she rooted on one of the seats in the ambulance, tearing up remorsefully. It was all her fault. All because she was just a bit pissed. All because she wanted to give someone a little lesson. And it turned out like this! It was the first painful realization in her entire life that she regretted of what she had done.

The students at the academy witnessed how Rui Su was carrying someone in her embrace, crying as she dashed out of Mr. Ye Chong's workshop. "What happened in there?" speculations started brewing among the students and teachers.

Rui Bing was at a much worse state than Ye Chong. He only suffered a moment of mentality drain and minor scratches on his body. On the other hand, Rui Bing not only was drained from that massive skill she had used accidentally, but also was damaged by Ye Chong as he forced himself out of her reach. Her body might be built over the years of training but it was still nothing compared to Ye Chong's inhumane, beast-like physique. That two blows Ye Chong delivered to her by the fists were absolutely critical.

To top them all, Ye Chong's final grip at her breasts was the most fatal of them all!

It was amazing that she did not pass out on spot. That was because she was thinking what could happen to her sister if she just passed out so easily. If it was not her sister, she would have passed out or died on the spot.

That grip on her breasts was more than just mind-shocking.

To a decent and traditional female in vows of chastity, what else could be more nerve-wrecking than this?

It could have been a major scoop of seeing the devil of the studio, Witch Su running out of Mr. Ye Chong's workshop crying. Despite that arousing curiosity in every student, no one was brave enough to step close to the workshop within the range of 10 meters! Even the staff from Workshop No.1 was running for his life.

Horrifying stories about Mr. Ye Chong's cold pair of eyes and his heart of ice started to reach everybody in the academy! It was not as horrifying as the urban tales actually. But at least, people had been warned and no one was foolishly bold enough to provoke this beast in the campus.

So the workshop was unvisited. No one could even muster the courage to knock at Mr. Ye Chong's door. And Ye Chong remained on the floor undisturbed for the whole day. The next day arrived with Ye Chong moaning in ache, his head felt like exploding and his body was weak.

"So you finally woke up?" the voice rang flatly in his mind.

"Ye..ah..." He rubbed his head, breathing cold as he spoke on in a coarse voice, "But my head hurts." His head was cracking, unfortunately there was no way of stopping it.

"According to my report, this is one of the aftereffects when you over-consumed your mentality. There are several methods to relief such pain. One of them being the brainwave treatment, or simply, an adequate rest."

"Brainwave treatment? Sounds like something done in the hospital, not here!" He continued rubbing his head and said, "Hey! Wait a minute!" He realized something as he asked, "You are Mu?"

"Certainly," Mu replied.

"What happened to Shang?"

"According to deed between us, he has to stay muted for the next 11 days."

"Oh..."

...

"Mu!" He remembered that technique struck on him. In full of excitement he started asking Mu, as if the pain in him was no longer there, "Was the technique used by that female the psychic attack you told me before? Didn't you mention something like how your attack lacked the psychic aspect or the mentality somehow?"

Mu was silent for a while.

"Insufficient data. Unable to deduce."

"Unable to deduce?" Ye Chong was disappointed, "Mhm. But I think that's what it is. It was an awful experience. It somehow would give you an impression that it is useless for you to put up resistance. But if we were to pilot a mech, wouldn't that be a little hard to include a psychic attack?" Ye Chong was too busy figuring out this problem that he forgot about the pain in his head. The rubbing hand on his head shifted to his chin as he pondered.

"Ye."

"Yes?" Ye Chong's focus went back to Mu.

"Isn't your head still in pain?" a trickery from the devil as he wagged his tail.

Ye Chong realized his head still hurt. The pain surged throughout his spines, flooding his senses again. "Ahhh!!" His hand shifted back to his head, "I almost forgot about it!" He hissed and puffed as he replied angrily, "Damn you Mu! I never knew you could be this shameless!"

"Shameless is indeed my middle name. Thank you for your kindest compliments!" he showed his appreciation in grace. "So, based on the information I had gotten, apparently that adjective you had mentioned about me contains highly discriminative and emotional connotation. Thus I suggest it should not be included in any form of judgment you made towards a particular item. Ye, enjoy this pain."

"Is there no way to reduce the pain?" Ye Chong was putting up his white flag.

"Mhm. There is," he answered calmly.

A gleam of hope shone upon Ye Chong, "What? How?"

"Such method does not require medication or any form of injection. It is safe and effective. You can feel it on spot..."

That line was familiar. The "yes" was going to slur out of Ye Chong's lips but he recalled what happened after the "yes".

He breathed in fright, "Is that your signature pain-relieving methodology of manually putting people in a fainted state?" It was back on Trash Planet-12 when Ye Chong overused his senses during one of the NRS Trainings which led a severe pain to his hands as he exceeded the threshold of his nervous system. And Mu used this so-called treatment to relieve his pain. It felt like yesterday when Ye Chong thought back of his experience with this treatment.

"You are correct!" Mu replied. One could hear the cheery bell ringing in a quiz game behind him.

Ye Chong wanted to tell Mu to forget it but the aches came crashing his head waves by waves. His brain was howling at his ears, rampaging in the sea of torment. His senses stood lonely at the corals surfacing on the sea, within the storm as he was engulfed by agony, spat out and then playfully swallowed in again. The coral he stood upon was shaking by the waves of pain. It seemed endless.

Such a torment! Ye Chong believed he would be going mad anytime soon. It would be better to at least minimize the pain! Ye Chong manned up and spoke to Mu, "Then... Mu... Well, do it! But make sure the hit counts!"

"The method was not recommended," Mu replied in his serene grace.

"Why?" Ye Chong was bewildered.

"The current phenomena in your head is considered as an extremely advantageous training towards your mentality. Of course, only if you were there the whole time to feel it."

Ye Chong shrieked, "Then why the heck did you mention it in the first place? Are you saying it for the sake of saying it?"

Mu was showing immense approval towards his statement, "Correct. I'm saying it for the sake of saying it."

Ye Chong could no longer stay polite, "You little piece of metallic junk!" He scolded, "You... You... How could you..." Ye Chong felt like passing out.

"To strengthen the effectiveness of your training, it is undeniably essential to give you an increased amount of stimulation," stated Mu.

Ye Chong spoke on lethargically, "Hiss... Mu... You are... You are cunning!"

"I do not understand what you meant by 'cunning'. According to the information I had received, I have been telling what is considered to be the truth the whole time," Mu replied.

Ye Chong was too tired to rebut Mu. Chances were he might not even stand the chance to win against him. Obviously he learned that Mu and Shang were both nasty characters to fiddle with.

"So how long... How long had I slept?" he tried holding his senses in the utter pain as he asked.

"28 hours and 36 minutes," Mu answered in accuracy.

"28 hours?" he muttered.

...

He jumped up high as he recalled something, "Ah! Does that mean I have missed my classes?" Ye Chong did not feel anything particularly exciting about classes, still he was the one in the deal, he had to accomplish the tasks he promised at his best!

"Not true. I have done it for you," replied Mu in suave.

"You have done it for me?"

"Uh huh."

"That works too. In the Virtual World both you and Shang are the sky-walking hackers. So I think that verification system in the academy is nothing compared to your skills. So, how do you feel about the first day in class?"

"My information shows that the word 'feel' is inappropriate in the application on non-living objects, for instance, me."

"You are still not sentimental. Or maybe... not sensible."

"Maybe. Oh yeah, we forgot something," Mu responded.

"What?"

"The pain in your head."

"Darn it I forgo-Ahh!! How to end this! Hiss... Ugh... Mu... You know..."

"You are good!"

# Chapter 88: The Troubled Chemist

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"Mu, are you sure we are going there?" Ye Chong asked in his head along the way.

"Yes. What Shang had proposed was correct. As stated in the information, Do-Kun stones are indeed able to grow in numbers as stimulated through presets by an alchemist."

"Gosh! You mean the chemist?" Ye Chong reminisced the torture he had been through these past few days in his head. It was melancholic, depressing or literally mind-blowing. The headache lasted for the entire 3 days and he almost broke his teeth from grinding them in pain. He made it through as the aches were slowly lifted. He did not feel anything particularly improved, despite the fact that his mentality was much stronger than before, as stated by Mu judging by the stable brainwaves in his head.

That sounded quite rewarding for the suffering he had undergone. He did not suffer for nothing at the very least. Nonetheless, before he could rejoice on the end of his agony, Mu had commenced the following torment for him - the Chemist Classes. The two big Cs struck on Ye Chong's head the moment he saw them hanging on the classy golden plate right outside the classroom. Luckily Mu was merciful enough to conduct mini classes on marksmanship in between, just to 'relax' his mind a little. Mu recommended a set of marksmanship based on his calculations, which were the usual Mu style - concise yet effective. They were not fancy enough to be called grandly as the "marksmanship" since the set contained only 8 movements. Yeah, movements. They were not even combos to begin with. They were just 8 basic movements of action as the final result of Mu's numerous intensive calculations and improvements after countless simulations in his processor. Considering how the ancient marksmanship was long gone, it would be a technological error 404 to find any applicable references. These movements were



constructed on a variety of physic theories with the aspect of minimizing the force input while maximizing the force output for instance. In short, these movements were a kind of production from Mu's simulating calculation.

Fortunately the workshop was spacious for his training. It was truly a huge storage. Ye Chong cleaned up one corner and hopped onto his Harmony, starting his training.

Ye Chong mastered combative skills on mech way faster than learning those gibberish in chemist theories. He had finished his marksmanship training, however, "I still have no idea what a chemist actually does." he mumbled as he got off his mech.

The chemist class today was on experiments. Well, experiments were the bread and butter of the chemist syllables. One did more experiments than theoretical lectures, unless the teacher was Shang, then it would be a parade of theoretical knowledge dancing through your left ear pinna all the way exiting from your right.

"Mu, don't you know what one needs to know about being a chemist? What am I here for?" Ye Chong asked blankly.

"What you need to know about being a chemist is that it is all about hands-on experience. The current theories in books are not perfectly constructed. They could lead to fallacies and consist major flaws. I would define chemist as an occupation that have not found their ideologies on logics. That is why Shang and I do not have much of an advantage in this. Unlike humans, they seemed to be able to conduct this perfectly fine despite the lack of logic."

The dean of the alchemy faculty in Blue Ocean Academy was Ms. Jiang Xiao'wei, who reacted with confusion the moment she saw Ye Chong's name as mentioned by Headmaster Lan beforehand. She did not understand how a boy would be interested in the alchemy, especially when he excelled in mechanics. Normally she would assume that the boy did not come for the classes, but rather, he came for the girls. The boys in alchemy classes were almost

non-existent. Yes, they were all girls, and very pretty ones too. The overflowing pheromone in the classroom usually netted a number of boys on their puberty. So if she were to see a boy in her class, the boy would normally be sitting fairly close to one of the girls and his eyes would be more onto the girl than the texts in front. However such label did not appear to be workable on a person like Ye Chong. She had seen him before. He was rather a cold person in her eyes and such cold person would not be interested in flirting an opposite gender using such a gimmicky trick.

More importantly, he seemed to have something going on with Rui Su. While she did have a few good-looking girls in her class, they were not of the same level as Rui Su. Yeah, it was just like comparing a bunch of sodium with a mere piece of rubidium. If he did have something with Rui Su, Ye Chong should not even be interested in her girls. Ms. Jiang was puzzled. It was as if she was presented with astronomical chemical equations bounded embodied with the truth of life.

...

"Here you are," stated Mu as they arrived.

The alchemy faculty was rather feminine for its imagery. Precisely speaking, it was flooded with girls and Ye Chong was like the ugly duckling among the swans as he walked in the corridor. These girls had first seen Ye Chong, only on a live channel that is. It was their first time seeing him in person.

He walked on expressionlessly, as his entity somehow set off an aura of isolation. No one was daring enough to initiate a conversation with him, though Ye Chong would not reply even if one did. It was an isolation that one would feel like hanging a sign over him, with the words written in red, "No Entry - Recognized Personnel Only". Ye Chong was too engaged in the conversation with Mu in his head that he simply did not have the time to take notice of those girls around.

"Oh? Really?" Ye Chong sounded surprised as he spoke.

"Correct. Data shows that quite a few types of special ores could multiply by simulations in certain presets, even though most of the data were lost while some of the remaining ones were already damaged. Shang is currently at a vigorous attempt to repair the existing data," Mu replied.

"Shang actually knows how to do that?" a shocking fact it was to Ye Chong. Apparently Shang was no other than the joker of mischief in his impression. Other than potentially being a mascot of the Fal Galaxy, he did not think of anything else befitting to this expressive intelligence.

"Yes. Shang has a much more mature mood matrix in comparison to me. So undeniably he has a better sense in alchemy too. In addition he expresses high interests in his past, while I agreed on the fact that these information could be very much useful in finding out the mech. Shang treated this repair as an excavation to his life, although I did not understand what he meant. At least I understand that it would be absolutely helpful for you if we were able to find out where this mech came from," Mu explained flatly.

"You have a point. You and Shang are so great, I believe the creator of both of you would be much greater," Ye Chong replied with expectation.

"Unknown. I have yet to receive sufficient information to justify that. But I could justify that your statement contains one flaw. I was not created, or 'produced' by them in your terms. Perhaps Shang was created under their hands, however my emergence was of an accident," corrected Mu.

"True."

Ye Chong's focus went back to the reality as he held his steps and looked around. At some point in the campus, the sense of direction was also considered as a fundamental skill for students. It was so compact that one could be lost forever if one did not take the effort

to remember the routes. Thankfully, Ye Chong's sense was not that bad and he had Mu. It would be much more challenging for one to lose the way than not to.

The girls at the surrounding were looking foreignly at Ye Chong. Some started chattering as they giggled, while the others sometimes pointed their fingers and whispered on. A male in the alchemy faculty was like a lamb falling into a pack of wolves. "And that happens to be the popular Mr. Ye Chong!" mumbled one of the girls excitingly.

Ye Chong did not seem to care. However, he could not show total ignorance as his ears were good. He could discern even the softest mumble from the girls. Well, the name "Ye Chong" consists of quite a number of sounded vowels and consonants, which made it outstanding in a whisper. Those whispers sounded like a flock of flies buzzing around his ears. It was not fatal, but it was annoying!

While the girls in love were flourishing the pumping heart of spring, Ye Chong stopped by and fired his stare. An ice beam round the corridors turned the living corridor of endearment into an arctic walkway of consternation. His sight launched a shower of arrows upon the girls.

The girls shuddered while some were hiding behind the lockers with their faces drained.

That settled it.

Leaving the girls, Ye Chong stepped into the lab building.

Unlike the spaciousness of his workshop, the lab for chemists was separated into countless tiny independent rooms. This was for safety purposes because of a certain risk a chemist had to bear whenever an experiment was conducted since living things possessed a chance of transmutation in a preset while the chemist's setting would accelerate and enhance the process. Spreading of these mutations were strictly forbidden without permission and certification of an official organization. This was reasonable

because the mutations could cause negative impacts to the ecosystem. They could kill the ecosystem too. Thus, it would be necessary to have cubicles instead of a spacious lab, for both the safety of the chemists and the environment.

And that was the time Ye Chong bumped into Ms. Jiang Xiao'wei. He had been in her class a few times so they were sort of acquainted by then. Nevertheless, Ms. Jiang had not gotten used to his existence in the alchemy faculty as she flinched when seeing Ye Chong, "Oh." She snapped out from her shock and gave a sweet smile, "Good day, Mr. Ye."

"Dean Jiang, what a pleasure. I hope to receive more of your teaching."

Ms. Jiang's smile was quite warm and natural. It was comforting to Ye Chong's eyes as his expression grew gentler.

"Well, it was not really a teaching. Just a few heads up sometimes. Mr. Ye, you can always come and drop by my office if you have any question regarding alchemy in your mind," she kindly replied.

"Thank you very much. Certainly I will," Ye Chong responded with courtesy.

They bade farewell to each other. "Well, Mr. Ye Chong isn't as unfriendly as I had heard..." muttered Ms. Jiang.

Ye Chong entered the class of the day. It was not Ms. Jiang who conducted the lesson. It was someone else, a female teacher he had never seen before.

Looking at the various flasks scattered on the table, along with tubes and tubes of reagents, Ye Chong was dumbfounded. He looked at the teacher who was being truly helpful as she did not seem to feel like talking, shutting her mouth tight at her desk. His eyes scanned through the items in blank dismay, he laid his hands over the flask and he withdrew them. As being still less competent

than a greenhorn in the lab, he simply had no idea where to begin.

Frowned, Ye Chong noticed how the girls around him were eyeing him the whole time.

"Ye." Just when Ye Chong was lost on the lesson, a voice came weakly by his ears, "C-Can I... you know... Can I group... Can I group with you?" Only then he realized there was someone by his side, as the intonation caught Ye Chong's attention. It was familiar.

He raised his head, "Is that you?" He saw someone standing right in front of him with her head lowered. Her fingers twiddling the skirt of her faculty uniform. It was Xiu. Her head was so low that Ye Chong could not see her face. But he could tell that she seemed pretty nervous as her shoulders were shaking.

The lab lost its usual hustling and muffling as everyone paused their works. Someone nearly dropped the thermometer in her trembling hands. They looked at two of them with their mouths wide open unconvincingly. Mr. Ye Chong was the celeb in the academy and the shrinking violet Xiu was outrageously fearless today to have a talk with the celeb himself. It was an earth-shattering sight. The whispers were gone too by then. The classroom was dead silent.

Xiu who seemed to have noticed everybody's incoming sights were lowering her head much more, as her cheeks reddened. Ye Chong was wondering if her neck would be broken as she lowered her head further. He lifted his head and glared at the girls around.

His cold sight caused everyone to retreat their stares right away as the hustling continued. The girls started acting they were busy carrying out their experiments all of a sudden. A dramatic acting it was too as one could hear the exaggerated clinking and clanking in the lab.

Xiu's appearance was like an angel coming from the sky to Ye Chong in rescue of his terrible day. Still he inhibited his emotion

as expressionlessly he replied, "Yes, you can."

"So they knew each other!"

"Oh my gosh!"

"This is one more story to our tea session later."

"Stop thinking about tea, we should do some research."

"On them?"

"No stupid. Only him."

Sharp gossips of exclamations rushed through the group of girls who were all ears to the conversation between Mr. Ye Chong and shy girl Xiu the whole time. Such a Columbus discovery! "I never knew Xiu was such a chaser!" Their impression towards Xiu grew complicated.

"Rea-" Xiu swiftly lifted her head, "Really?" she asked in disbelief. The polished face of hers dented with a hint of scarlet, a beautiful moment of embarrassment to be perceived.

"Of course," he nodded his head. Ye Chong hurrahed in his mind as there was finally an assistant to guide his way out of this glassware jungle.

And so Assistant Xiu started a brief tutorial for Ye Chong. It went well.

Maybe.

...

... ..

"So... Th-this is the Ga...ga...Gallo-blue culture medium. It is one of the 15 types of basic mediums you would use. And... And...what it does is... it helps speeding up the... g-g-growth of plants... by...by producing... I mean, providing the necessary nutrients for the process... Umm..."

"Also... the heater is very easy to use. You just... you just... set the

temp...temp...temporal? W-what... oh, the temperature at the processor, b-b-but you have to be careful... that... umm... what was it again... umm... uhh..."

...

Could I ever exit the jungle in one piece?

Especially under the aid of this troubled chemist?



## Chapter 89: What Happened

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A sprout of crimson plant stood still in a transparent culturing tube. Its leaves were ovate and in dark red, veins densely crept over its thick leaves. The stem was supple as it twirled over the tube with its sharp lilac red body. At the top there laid a few berries with the shape like lanterns in red-yellow stripes. The fruits were seemingly well-grown as it looked succulent and fleshy, rather mouth-watering if one may ask Xiu.

"Okay, this is one of the common spices one would see - the Maroon Bay." Xiu became relatively calmer than before after getting used to interacting with Ye Chong slowly, "If you would take a look at this, these lanterns have one particular thing we need inside them." Xiu carefully plucked one of the so-called "lanterns" from the Maroon Bay using something like a pair of forceps but they looked more refined. "We are going to extract it." She laid it on a clean petri dish and poked a hole on it. Bright reddish liquid oozed out of the pore and filled the petri dish. Out of a sudden, a fairly dense scent wafted throughout the classroom. "Since it is extracted from the Maroon Bay, we call it the 'Maroon Extract'." She put the tool down and carried on elaborating.

"Such extract is mainly used in production of premium aromatic flavoring. Mhm, like a perfume for example. Since one could not culture it in mass productions, its price is naturally much higher. Haha, a lot of girls in our faculty would use it sometimes, though I prefer the scent of Fading Azure. Too bad Xuelin never appreciated these lovely smells!" Xiu giggled as she spoke, one could tell that she was somewhat confident in this. The usual shrinking violet would bloom anytime when any question was asked regarding her profession. She would become serious and her timid nature would disappear.

And more surprisingly, throughout the class, only Xiu was able to complete the extraction. Yes, none of the other gossiping girls

around her completed the task of the day.

Ye Chong had his eyes fixed on this very sprout in the tube throughout the rapid growth process. Within the past few hours, the seed was directly raised to its mature state while the former growth duration of this sprout would have taken 15 years in its habitat. The ground-shattering fact shocked Ye Chong! The first time it was he felt the depth, the amazing perks of being a chemist.

And this was an utterly living organism!

"So Ye, why were you interested in the alchemy in the first place? We don't usually see boys here you know..." Xiu looked at Ye Chong with her eyes opened wide in innocent curiosity.

"Just interested," he reasoned it as he just so happened to be very interested.

"But aren't you a technician? The expertise in the alchemy does not seem to be helpful to you anyhow? The main fields involved in this are botany and microbiology, which I think they aren't useful for your work... somehow..."

"Botany and microbiology?" asked Ye Chong.

"Yes, our botany primarily consists of studies on spices, ingredients, herbs... and a little bit of others on botanical aspect. Mostly the studies focus on how to encourage the growth of the plants to reduce the time taken of the growing process and also on how to enhance certain effects of the plant's extract. We often carry out researches with such aim on plants that are either scarce by nature or take too long to grow while having high demands in a larger market. So yeah, botanical chemists are very common nowadays. I'm one of them too!" Xiu pointed at her tiny nose as she spoke in a swing.

"But microbiological applications are also frequently used in the faculty too. Many of them use microorganism to produce a particular kind of enzyme or polypeptides. That sounds cool too!"

Xiu expressed admiration on her face.

"So!" Ye Chong was intrigued, "Is there any kind that does ores?"

"Ores?" Xiu shook her head and she affirmed, "Duh, of course not! Ores do not show any attribute of a living thing. How do we even culture it when it does not even reproduce by itself. Well, some do animals. But it has been strictly forbidden by the 5 major galaxies in black and white, though there are still some people who do it in the dark. How could the people be so evil and heartless!" Xiu's face inflated in agitation.

As expected, what was kept in Mu's databank was not anything ordinary. Nevertheless, Ye Chong had always trusted the statements inside the record. He never doubted its validity!

Xiu mentioned about culturing animals, which piqued his interest, "Animals? Why do they ban chemists from doing animals?"

Xiu's face looked extremely disgusted, "Well, if you do it on animals, a lot of weird stuffs would come out! These are no longer animals, they are monsters! And these monsters are much more dangerous than whole lab of mutated plants. They are brutal by nature. It was not only that but also such act questions the ethnicity of our profession. It is cruel! Too cruel! So any government on any galaxy bans this inhumane act!"

Ye Chong seemed to get it at first... but somehow he lost it later.

But then, what has that to do with me? Ye Chong discarded the complicating thoughts.

He looked upon the bay inside the rube as he complimented the amazing capability of this expertise in mind. Gradually he grew fond of the alchemy. He reflected on what Xiu had demonstrated, the reagent she had used and the way she executed the tasks, comparing them to what he had drilled into his head back then as he learned about the mechs.

The alchemy wasn't that bad!

Thought Ye Chong.

...

!

Uggghghhhhhh!!

Out of the blue, a piercing pain struck on his heart. Whimpered, he covered his left chest with his right hand as he curved his back subconsciously.

Ahhh! It hurts!

Ye Chong could feel his heart bursting like a balloon on this needle-piercing pain. His face turned dead pale immediately as sweats streamed over his shivering forehead.

The stabbing pain surged through his body before he could do anything. It felt like every bit of his inner flesh was shredded and ground. A distorting ache bounced inside his organs one after another. His eyes went dazed as dizzy he had become. ZZzzt! His muscles felt like they were being torn apart into a million pieces. Ye Chong tried to hold the incoming aches but he failed miserably. He moaned slightly as he lost control.

His heart, his chests, arms and legs; it felt like he was no longer in command of them. The torture seized into his veins as it engulfed Ye Chong's sanity like an army of ants. The minuscule pricking on every part flooded his body.

Wham! Ye Chong could stand straight no more. He fell onto the ground, bowing like a grilled shrimp. His face was utterly drained by then, the muscles distorted helplessly. What a fearsome sight!

"Ah!" Xiu dropped the flask in her hand. She covered her mouth as shrieks escaped in the sharpest hiss through the gaps of her fingers. The classroom was distressed!

"Ye! Ye! What happened to you? Speak to me! Please... No...

Teacher! Teacher!!"

Such a heart-skewing pain. Ironically Ye Chong had to stay awake to experience every bit of it. He was more conscious than ever for some reason. He could clearly feel the thumps falling onto his body. His nerves had never felt so discerning before!

It might be extraordinarily useful anytime but not now. It had become a torment to Ye Chong obviously!

There was no expression on his face anymore. Even the muscles on his face were no longer of his control! Technically, there was not a piece of muscle in his control. It felt like he had fainted but he had not. In fact, his mind was clearer than ever!

"Ye... Ye... What has happened?" Mu's calm voice sounded a little fret.

He tried to reply yet his brain waves felt blocked out completely. He could hear Mu and he could call out to him, again and again. However, Mu never heard him, not even once.

"Ye. It is not mature for you to do this."

"Ye."

"Ye!"

Mu's voice grew panicked as he did not receive any form of response from Ye Chong. There was no brainwave from him too, as if he was dead.

3 minutes! For three minutes! A never-before-felt pain tossed him into the underworld, sinking him into a barren agony. Boundlessly, endlessly, lawlessly it inched towards Ye Chong. There was fright in him despite being a strong man he always was! The taste of death, it was so close, the very first time to him.

He endured the pain. By then the continuous headaches he suffered days back after overloading his head was nothing compared to this tsunami of torment. The headache was because of

mentality while this was a pure body sear. Moreover, this sudden pain was much more absurd compared to the headache he had.

Nevertheless, thanks to the experience before, Ye Chong did not break down that quickly. He tried shifting his focus as he converged his thoughts at the strides on the floor. The tempestuous ache caused his mind to diverge a little, unfortunately that did not help Ye Chong out as the pain continued without weakening.

He mustered the remaining bit of his consciousness, little by little, all concentrated, he could not mess this up! He could not believe the fact that he would lose his mind someday.

Strangely, as how without forewarning the pain came, right when Ye Chong was going mad, it vanished!

Yes, it vanished without forewarning too!

He regained control of his body. It felt like his body was the mech while his mind was the pilot. During that few minutes of chaos, the pilot lost control of his mech, then right before the crash, he retrieved the access to the control panel out of sudden.

So it was a dream?

He climbed up from the ground as his mind twiddled on everything. His body might have recovered yet his head was still messed up!

As Mu sensed reconnection to Ye Chong's brain, he asked in panic, "What had just happened Ye?!"

His mind had yet settled down. His eyes weaved through the frightened girls around him. He shook his head violently, attempting to snap out of confusion.

It took about half a minute for Ye Chong to recover fully from the havoc just now.

The girls looked exceedingly afraid, including Xiu who backed off

with the girls upon seeing Ye Chong waking up.

Ye Chong certainly had no idea how terrifying he appeared at that moment.

His paper-white face was the kind from the classic horror movies, the haunting ghost role of course; while droplets of sweat smudged his features along with some occasional twitches on his face. Creepy... No, disturbing!

"We will talk about this later, Mu." muttered in his thought, Ye Chong responded to Mu.

He inhaled deeply, waved his limbs slightly, only to make sure he had truly restored control over his body. All he thought by then was to leave straightaway. The crowd had worsened his fear, the people would do him no good. The man who crawled out of the hell's gate would like some moments, alone! He had to conduct a discussion with Mu regarding the hows and whys of this.

He got up and was ready to move, "Who?!" Two oddly-dressed men at their middle-age stormed in with cases in their hands, "Who was unwell?" The pale green suit was absolutely a weird choice of uniform...

And everyone backed out for a way. The two men approached Ye Chong.

"That's Mr. Ye!" Ye Chong's face that had gone colorless, that overwhelming amount of sweat over his body, a fool could tell something must have happened to him. One of the men recognized him as he shouted and went upon Ye Chong waddling, "Are you sick? We received an emergency call from here and we thought some students were unwell out of the blue. Never knew it was you the teacher who got sick. Come, we will do a check-up for you. Yeah, it's a little crowded here, we will get you shifted to the other classroom."

"It's o-" Right when Ye Chong who strived for a moment of

isolation was going to reject the offer, Mu whispered, "It would be recommended to have a check-up, Ye."

5 minutes later... he was at the other classroom.

"Mr. Ye, we are pitifully sorry that we can't find anything wrong on your body." The doctor who performed the diagnosis was stern as he spoke, "Perhaps our facilities are too limited. We suggest you to transfer to the advanced medical center at the academy instead, just for a safer and detailed check-up. Alright, there's nothing else we could do here, if you would excuse us." He kept his tools and turned away, "Also, Mr. Ye, please, do, make sure you have your check-up at the advanced medical center. Very well, good bye, have a nice day!"



# Chapter 90: Deduction

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"Thank you, we hope to see you in good shape soon!"

Ye Chong exited from the medical center he was told to go to. The doctor's words echoed, "Mr. Ye, your body is in the pink of health, well, pinker than most of the people I had seen. So no problem! What you have mentioned about today was probably a form of illusion I supposed, due to excessive fatigue or tension in your mind. It is a conventional symptom for workaholics. So don't work too hard. Mr. Ye, I know you might be demanding of yourself and you have a good body, but you are still a human, you need to rest. I would advise you to rest adequately."

In that chain of explanation from the doctor, Ye Chong only discerned that one striking word - illusion.

Illusion? Impossible!

That horrible sensation remained imprinted in Ye Chong's mind. It was endless, a no-return, a no-escape kind of pain... Scary! Ye Chong shuddered. He absolutely wanted to know what exactly had happened! It stayed like a hanging sword upon his head, a threat coming anytime soon to Ye Chong, making him restless and spineless.

Could it be some strange diseases people had been talking about? Those incurable kinds... But I had never gotten it before! The doctor said the same too - there was nothing, while Mu said the Blue Ocean Academy's own medical center was as advanced as it was called... then there should be nothing wrong. The doctor should be right!

That awful experience, there would be no way Ye Chong would want the second time!

If there would be another anyway, he doubted he could survive that.

"Do you have any deduction for this, Mu?" Ye Chong asked impatiently, almost in a begging tone. He did not care if it was a baseless inference, he just wanted an answer! He could feel the insanity growing in himself, along with the agitation, the edginess. The former calm and still self of his had long gone by then.

"Ye, calm down." Mu spoke flatly as he sensed something wrong with Ye Chong, "Take a deep breath. Like your combat routine. The negative emotion would only be hindering you. They are unhelpful and will only lead you to even more terror. Ye, breathe in, then breathe out. Breathe your soul!"

In almost at a split second, a rampaging feeling scorched his nerves. The heat flowed in his body like burning lava. It was so hot that Ye Chong could feel his eyes glowing raging red, while the skin of his hands were colored in a spooky vermilion, like a flaming piece of metal. It was annoying! Infuriating! Maddening! His body was hot, piping hot! A thought jammed his thinking and overwrote everything else - Destruction! Unleash the inside!

"Breathe your soul."

If it was not Mu who said this line, he might had given an ultimate corkscrew punch right onto the person's face, no matter who the person was.

He huffed and puffed. The fierce breath of his was boiling the nasal cavity. It was not the air he was breathing, it was more like the inferno, blazing inferno!

He tried to inhibit the brewing heat storm in him. His instinct sensed the danger behind this berserk as soon as it emerged. An emotionless, nonchalant person he had been was alarmed by this uprising in his body.

Breathe in! Breathe out! Deep breath!

Gasp.

Ye Chong was facing utter difficulty to carry out this daily

practice which was a piece of cake for him before.

"Just breathe... Breathe in... Yes, breathe out... In...Out... Take the rhythm, ride on it... Yes, you are a good boy," Mu's voice was hypnotizing as Ye Chong followed his order obediently.

As his breathing grew calmer, his head cooled down. The heat disintegrated gradually and Mu got his old Ye Chong back.

Such a breach at his security had exhausted quite a portion of his stamina. Rivers of sweat connected to each other on his forehead while wetting his entire clothes. Achoo! Ye Chong sneezed abruptly as a wind blew by.

"I think...Haha..." Ye Chong laughed bitterly, "Mu, I'm in trouble again, am I not?"

"Yes," Mu replied approvingly. "Ye, you do not seem right with that look. However there has yet to be a proper solution from me."

"What exactly had happened?" Ye Chong was vexed with himself. And that vex fell into a ripple in his mind, causing another storm again as his blood boiled. Breathe! Ye Chong out of his horror took a few rounds of deep breathing again and finally stabilized the rumble before the storm.

"Ye, stay calm." Mu explained, "As what the data showed, assuming if this neither was an inborn disease due to family inheritance nor was due to a kind of virus infection back at Trash Planet-12, I have a deduction now."

"What deduction?" Ye Chong asked.

"The silver liquid you dipped in back at the Black Cove." Added Ye Chong, "Possibility - 67%. Only that would be the suspect to this."

Ye Chong figured it out the moment Mu mentioned about the Black Cove, "No wonder they don't seem to really care about the security. They actually have this to capture runaways in their hands."

"And that is why..." Ye Chong eventually made sense of what he had encountered, "That is why, Johansson did not appear to be in desire of killing me. That was not a murder, but an escort. And he just had the way to make sure he could escort me back to the Black Cove."

"Wow!" Mu's exclaimed voice was flat. "It seems like you really have become smarter."

"Uh huh, if this is true, then that thing..." Ye Chong flinched. "That thing would not only happen once!" As soon as the conclusion flashed in his mind, his brain jammed.

Imagined the number of times he had to suffer all those, Ye Chong's face was grim.

"Poor Ye," and all Mu could do was to show sympathy.

Apparently there were not many options for him. If he were to return to Black Cove to become a pawn by some mastermind, he would rather die! That tenacity and fighting will he got from living on Trash Planet-12 would be what he needed! He still had hope! And he had Mu and Shang!

Ye Chong spent the next few days in worry, anticipating that horrendous storm to come striking him again from time to time. Yet strangely, it did not happen. That surprised Ye Chong.

Well, thinking again, Ye Chong assumed his anticipation would not be helpful at all. Generally he would have lost full access control of his body by then. He could not even speak to Mu through telepathy. If that would be the case... Ye Chong decided to live on without fear. For safety, he planned to reduce the time outside and he did not intend to go back to Grandpa Qian anymore. He could not predict when this dreadful symptom would occur again but he could predict that surely if it happened and anything else dreadful happened along, he could just be the dead meat on the chopping board with no place to run.

So Ye Chong spent the whole day rooting himself at his workshop while Mu booted his mech self to hide within the countless mechs Ye Chong had in his place, striving to protect Ye Chong at any casualty.

He thought he would be in peace at least. Unfortunately, his fame did not decrease.

"Ye Chong!" Rui Su came slamming the door open, "You! Go to my place! Now! My sister wants to see you!" she came in with a brief command and introduction. Her expression was unhappy.

"Your sister?" frowned Ye Chong as he asked.

"The lady you fought that day? Who came with me?" her eyes slightly reddened as she reminisced the incident.

"Oh!" Rui Su was finally speaking his language - the lady he fought that day. He remembered everything. Normally Ye Chong would jump from his seat, nodding his head as he marched to the place, if it was an invitation from a challenger, especially if the challenger had some fancy tricks that could hold him back. However, he refused.

Without hesitation and further inquiry, "No," he gave a direct decline in Rui Su's face.

"You... You..." Rui Su was so irritated that her face turned pale as she bit her teeth.

What a weird girl. Ye Chong could not understand the girl before him, he decided to deal with ignorance.

Rui Su wanted to be nice at first, nevertheless Ye Chong seemed to be uninterested in the kind self of hers. That was when she transformed back into the notorious Witch Su, "Ye! Chong! Are you a man? Let me ask you, Are! You! Still! A! Man?! I can't believe my ears of hearing such puny words from a puny person like you! I had never seen such a useless piece of dirt in my entire life! You don't even have the balls to go to my place! You coward! You

spineless squid!"

Ye Chong spectated the amazing talk show from Rui Su nonchalantly. His ears had grown numb towards personal attacks and offensive languages.

"So Mu, shouldn't humans be afraid of death?" Ye Chong asked in his mind.

"They should," said Mu.

"Then isn't it normal for one to be a coward in this?" he asked on.

"Well, in the society, fearing death is considered as a cowardly act, even if they all fear the death like no one ever did." Explained Mu.

"B-o-r-i-n-g!" exclaimed Ye Chong.

"Right," Mu agreed too.

"Are you listening to me? My sister is calling you, no, ordering you to move that broken bottom of yours to my place! You heard it? Move! Why aren't you moving? Oh my Fal Galaxy if there's a quantum singularity I swear I'll catapult you into it..."

The bickering went on for a moment.

And Rui Su realized it was pointless to scold her signature lines at Ye Chong. She became parched and tired. Nothing had happened other than most of her inner blaze had extinguished.

"Please..." Going the hard way did not work it seemed, so Rui Su decided to plead instead, "I beg you. Please, Ye Chong, please. It's just a trip to my house. My sister wants to see you... Just come... Could you kindly do my poor, poor sister a favor?" her watery eyes overflowed with pity. Anyone else would have accepted her plea right away seeing those eyes.

Well it was "anyone else" after all.

Not Ye Chong.

Ye Chong did not have concept on how this "begging" worked.

"The heck she's doing, Mu?" Ye Chong inquired bewilderedly.

"Technically, she was trying to initiate your urge to protect her by acting as a weakling in the situation." Concisely he replied, "Most of the women use such method to gain a man's sympathy," added Mu.

"She's acting weak, hoping that the enemy would come and pity her?" Ye Chong was not convinced, the logic did not work in his head it seemed.

"Uh... well..." Mu halted for a noticeable length, "The relationship between men and women are not malignant to begin with."

"Well then, what is it?" Ye Chong asked.

"Regarding that, I suggest you to have your session with Shang, he is more of an expert in this," and Mu quickly shut his mouth.

Rui Su tried to rephrase her plight and redid her acting repetitively. Still, it did not work on the man with a heart of iron. Rui Su never expected Ye Chong to be this hard to penetrate. She could not believe that her ways neither hard nor soft worked. The feeling did not even seep into his skin! She became desperate as her signature tricks with a 100% success rate on other men did not work on him.

She recalled what her sister told her back at their home and tears wetted her beautiful face.

It shocked Ye Chong a little. Yeah, only a little.

"Sniff... Sniff..." Rui Su held her tears and looked at Ye Chong wholeheartedly, "In what way you would agree to see my sister?"

"Umm..."

Ye Chong thought for a moment, "Get her here, if she wanted to see me that badly."

With Mu lurking in the queue of mechs, he believed he would be in good hands even if that disastrous syndrome happened again.

"Okay! Fine!" Rui Su rushed out of the workshop in tears. "You better remember this! Ye Chong!!!" The students on the way were impressed by Ye Chong. They almost wanted to drop by the workshop to give a salutation as he managed to make the witch of the campus to cry twice in a row! Spectacular!

What Ye Chong did not expect was, Rui Bing actually came!

And she was alone!



# Chapter 91: Shang's Idea I

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Rui Bing sat before Ye Chong, her face pale, drained of blood. It seemed that she was not yet recovered from the injuries from before. Her long, black hair further emphasized her pallor, and her occasionally knitted brows made for a pitiful appearance! Her former magnificence was now turned into fragility. Her thin physique under the loose training garb made her look as weak as a withering leaf.

Ye Chong was also shocked to see Rui Bing as she was!

Rui Bing noticed that Ye Chong was unharmed, and said wryly, "You are truly physically strong!"

Ye Chong sat quietly. While he did not understand the reason for her visit, Ye Chong still threaded with care, with Mu standing quietly behind him. If anything happened, Mu would be able to react at the drop of a hat. Besides, he was not entirely defenseless himself, only that his weird condition might be triggered again.

Ye Chong sat quietly, his eyes staring at the other party, unblinking. He was waiting for her to state the purpose of her visit, for he believed that she would not have visited for no good reason. Ye Chong believed that this woman sitting before him, the strongest woman he had ever met, would not be up to a silly action like that.

As for Rui Bing, Ye Chong still had full admiration for her. Her skills in martial arts were levels above his, and that move was most likely an attack filled with spirit, in Mu's words. That had made Ye Chong appreciate her even more! It was the first time Ye Chong had seen an attack that was beyond the logic of pure physics!

Rui Bing did not say anything, sitting quietly before Ye Chong, her dark eyes staring straight at him.

Their eyes met each others' in the space between them!

A faint blush began to spread quietly up Rui Bing's nape!

Her silence was baffling to Ye Chong, as he had thought her as someone straightforward in nature. Since she had visited, there must be something on her mind, so why would she not speak of it? Ye Chong broke the silence and spoke, "Why are you here?"

His flat tone together with his apathetic expression made Rui Bing turn serious. While her body was not fully healed, her former fighting instinct as a martial arts practitioner was awakened!

Rui Bing sat upright, her expression stern, but her first words thoroughly confused Ye Chong.

"Will you marry me?"

"Marry her? What?" Thankfully, Mu was near him, and Ye Chong communicated with Mu through his brain waves. "Mu, what does it mean to marry her?"

"Hmm, based on available information, it probably means becoming legal husband and wife!" Mu explained.

"What's legal husband and wife?" Ye Chong was baffled.

"Er, this area is not my specialty, you should ask Shang about it. We need 5 seconds to interchange!" Mu was obviously troubled with the question as well, and decided to let Shang, with a more advanced mood matrix, to deal with the matter.

As soon as Shang was out, he howled electronically. "Waah, Ye, as expected, it's the aggressive beauty from last time. Tsk tsk, a beauty like this who fits all your requirements is truly rare!"

Ye Chong did not quite get it. "What does that have to do with being a beauty?"

Shang bluntly spoke, "Of course, who wouldn't love a beautiful woman?" He deliberately paused before continuing, "Mm, of course, your taste is too peculiar! However, does she not suit your standards? The body cannot be too muscular, that would affect

speed, and she cannot be too thin, for the muscles must be powerful enough. Mm, endurance is a must and flexibility must be excellent. Excellence in martial arts, almost as good in mechs as I am. A decisive person, one-hit KO's are preferable! High vigilance. Best if she can be proficient in mech mechanics! Besides the mech side of things, it seems that she was almost made based on your criteria! Besides, it's quite fast to build up knowledge in mechs! Ye, I can't think of anyone who can better fit your requirements than her!"

Ye Chong was still uncertain. "What does this have to do with marrying her?"

Shang nearly fainted at that. "Ye, could it be that you're still not in your puberty? Heavens! You're twenty! This is too bizarre in the face of biological theories! Could it be ... Could it be ... You're ..." Shang's voice was getting queer!

His hesitance in speech also made Ye Chong even more confused. "Biology? Theories in biology? Isn't this an alchemist program?"

Shang nearly cried. "Cough ... Theories in biology? Ye, you can't go on like this, I must now begin to show you the right path of humanity! I can't let Mu mislead you anymore, heavens, I can already imagine the darkness and dullness of your future life!"

After a pause, Shang continued encouragingly, "Ye Chong, do you like her? Compared to all the women you've ever met before." His voice now had a bewitching quality to it.

Ye Chong lifted his head and peered towards Rui Bing. Rui Bin sat in all seriousness, but a flash of panic was evident in her eyes. Ye Chong considered before replying, "I like her!" It seemed that, of all the women he had ever met, she was the only that made him feel a sense of admiration, and she was definitely the strongest of woman he had ever encountered!

"But, what's that got to do with anything?" Ye Chong's logic was not affected at all by Shang!

"Er ... Nothing! But Ye, when can you began your life as a real man?" Shang gave a long sigh!

"Am I not normal?" Ye Chong was obviously dissatisfied with the conclusion.

"Could it be that you have no sexual desires for women?" Shang barely managed to ask.

"Sexual desires?" Ye Chong was at a loss. "Should anyone have sexual desires towards women?"

Shang felt like he was dealt with a death blow. "Ye, you ... You're too good at this!"

"Me? I'm still not good enough. Compared to Mu, I'm still too weak!" Ye Chong replied.

"Compared to Mu? Heavens, it's like talking with an animal! No, Ye, it seems that it'll be necessary to teach you a lesson in biological reproduction! Ye, later I'll show you some of the latest holographic passionate battles, that's my ultimate collection!" Shang spoke with fiery intensity.

"Holographic information? Passionate battles? Is it a battle between mechs?" Ye Chong asked.

"A battle between mechs?" Shang's photon processor was visualizing 2 humanoid mechs engaged in a passionate battle midair, machine oil spraying everywhere, accessories flying off in all directions, together with a cringe-worthy sound of metal rubbing against metal. Shang felt a chill spread across him and nearly short-circuited!

For someone as logic-minded as Ye Chong to discuss emotions, especially that of between members of the opposite sex, it was definitely a depressing challenge for Shang!

Rui Bing held a normal expression, but her heart was throbbing violently. Ye Chong, sitting opposite her, had at first lowered his head in thought, then lifted his vision to her for a moment before

continuing his thoughts. For the first time ever, Rui Bing had a strange feeling, mixed with hope and fear, afraid of what she might lose! She could only do her best to stay calm, or at least maintain the impression of calmness!

Rui Bing was aware of her own traditional mindset, even when she had chosen to inherit her father's dojo years ago despite opposition. All these years, the age-old traditions had already become part of her, and she was not capable of changing this part of herself, nor did she wanted to! This kind of life made her feel peaceful!

Rui Bing's eyed the man before her with mixed feelings. Will this man, whom she had met not so long ago, be her future husband? If he rejected, what should she do? While she had insisted on traditional practices, it did not mean that she should impose it on others. Her persistence was her own, and Ye Chong's rejection was only natural, then what should she do?

Although she already had her mind set, Rui Bing was still at a loss at the present moment!

"Alright, back to the original question, what does it mean to to marry her? What's the end result?" Ye Chong asked.

"Marrying her means having a legal bond of husband and wife between you two. The end result if that you will be with her for the rest of your life!" Shang did not think Ye Chong could understand anything beyond that.

"Be with her? Why should I be with her for the rest of my life?" Ye Chong asked another mind-bending question to Shang!

Shang was speechless!

Shang did not believe that a healthy man like Ye Chong would not be interested in women at all. Suddenly, a brilliant idea came to his mind.

"Ye, to make you understand this whole affair, we can do an

experiment!" Shang's tone was odd, but he had finally concluded that Ye Chong could only handle facts!

"Okay, how?" Ye Chong was also keen to try. He was always asking these sort of questions, and Ye Chong had no intention of being entirely ignorant of this topic.

"Go right in front of her. Don't worry, she'll definitely not harm you. Besides, in her current condition, she's not a match for you!" Shang enticed.

"Okay!" Ye Chong walked to Rui Bing and stopped before her, and panic flashed past Rui Bing's pale face.

"Take her hand!" The devil's tail began to show itself.

"Hand?" Ye Chong felt uncertain, and asked, "Which hand?"

Crash A certain devil's fall sent out a shockwave. Shang spoke with a trembling voice, "Whichever!" Shang's fall to the ground shocked Rui Bing, but it had also eased her nervousness against Ye Chong's approach.

Ye Chong took Rui Bing's right hand, his body in high alert, ready for any form of attack from her. For Ye Chong, his action would definitely invite retaliation from the other party! No one would let their hand be held in another person's hands - the action was akin to giving up one's life to another person!

However, Rui Bing's reaction baffled Ye Chong. She pulled her hand back a little, but not enough to escape from his grasp. Her tightly closed lips were pale from the pressure! Her initial pallor was now replaced with a thorough blush, but she did not lower her head, managing to look right at Ye Chong. Her clear eyes were filled with a rare coquetry and a little stubbornness. She kept her gaze on Ye Chong!

"What next?" Ye Chong asked.

"Have a good feel of her hand!" The devil's tail was growing obvious.

## Chapter 92: Shang's Idea II

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"Feel her hand?" Ye Chong was confused. Could it be that her hand had something special about it? Ye Chong felt the hand carefully, but did not notice anything special! However, to think that such a soft and delicate hand could have such potential for battle! Ye Chong's hands may be long and slender, but his hands were solid and muscular, quite different from the woman's.

Could this be what Shang wanted him to notice?

Ye Chong spoke, "It's soft, with callouses around the edges of the palm, evident signs of some level of training, but her hand is obviously of a different type than mine. Could there be some mystery behind this?"

Shang stammered, "Ye - Ye, is this what you feel?"

"Yup, what's the problem?" Ye Chong replied.

Shang was full of disbelief. "Ye, can you really not feel anything else? Like, does it feel comfortable?"

"I suppose it does!" Ye Chong gave a little squeeze to the delicate hand, "But, what does it matter?"

By then, poor Rui Bing was as red as a tomato, but still she refused to lower her head. Her clear eyes were now growing watery, and her tightly held lips were a sign of her exerting strong self control! Since young, no man had ever touched her hands, but the man before her had now grasped her hand in his, doing as he wished! While she had already decided to marry this man, she still could not accept that the man was given in to such frivolity, as her rational side kept her composed!

A strange, unprecedented tingling sensation came from her right hand. She could even feel the strength and warmth from Ye Chong's palms. The feeling was unnerving, and she was at a loss as to what to do next!

Shang muttered, "Looks like this degree of stimulation is too little. For a wild animal like Ye, no, a humanoid mech may be more appropriate. This degree of stimulation is too little!"

Shang became more spirited and said, "Ye, for the next step, put your nose near to the left side of her throat, keep the distance less than 2 centimeters, and feel it closely!"

Ye Chong did not doubt Shang's request and did as he was told in all seriousness. Suddenly, he moved his face close to Rui Bing's neck, his nose almost touching her skin, no more than 2 centimeters from him. A mysterious, sweet smell came to him. Her warm, snow-white skin had his full attention, and, almost reflexively, Ye Chong could not help but stick out his tongue and lick her neck!

In an instant, Ye Chong felt like his belly was on fire! He felt a burning surge engulf him! Ye Chong couldn't help but gasp heavily!

Faced with this stimulation, Ye Chong felt a buzz in his head. Almost immediately, the powerful flow of emotions that he suppressed a few days ago was like a stoked fire, and Ye Chong felt like his brain might blow up! The overwhelming wild emotions engulfed him in an instant, and Ye Chong could only see red in his eyes, and his last thought before he lost consciousness was this -

"This, is a woman?"

Rui Bing could not keep her composure when Ye Chong put his face so close to her. As Ye Chong licked, she was thunderstruck! Ye Chong's heavy breath against her sensitive neck only made Rui Bing more anxious!

Almost without thinking, Rui Bing, with a long history of martial arts training and self defense, was driven to action! Rui Bing slid her right hand and grabbed Ye Chong's left hand. Her soft, white hands were now as strong as hardened steel. Her left hand pressed towards Ye Chong's chest as fast as lightning and her legs moved as



she stood up, lifting Ye Chong with her!

Women's Basic Anti Sexual Assault Skills - Third Move!

Nether Region Kick!

The kick was perfect, strength or angle-wise, and Ye Chong curled into a shrimp-like posture but, oddly, did not produce any pitiful shriek!

The move was followed immediately by an over shoulder throw. Her movements were fluid and natural, and any martial arts practitioner who witnessed Rui Bing's move after move would have been very impressed!

In reality, Rui Bing did not know any anti sexual harassment moves at first. However, the dojo often had some female students who came to learn some basic defense skills, and Women's Basic Anti Sexual Assault Skills were a necessary part of it. Hence, Rui Bing had deliberately learned a few moves, and they now conveniently served her !

Ye Chong was like a sandbag, ruthlessly thrown to a corner and left on the floor, without any reaction!

Ye Chong's mind was like a sea of fire, his consciousness struggling to survive within the fiery ocean, as his external senses had been thoroughly eclipsed! The volcanic flow of emotions wreaked havoc in his mind, and Ye Chong's barely surviving consciousness was also affected. He only felt heat, of which was the most intense heat!

An unspeakable feeling began to accumulate within Ye Chong!

But strangely, his body was not at his command!

The suffocating and intense sense of outrage whirled within Ye Chong's mind like a storm, and Ye Chong felt more and more heated, but could find no way to vent off his feelings!

When Rui Bing came back to her senses and found Ye Chong on

the floor, unmoving, she was shocked to the core, extremely regretting her actions. How could she be so impulsive? What will happen to her if he was injured? The thought of that kick earlier made Rui Bing panic!

Rui Bing was about to approach Ye Chong and check for injuries when a shadow flashed before her eyes, and a huge, green-ish figure flew past Ye Chong and was almost immediately out of the mech modification workshop!

Surprised, Rui Bing rushed to the workshop's entrance, but the huge figure and Ye Chong were already gone without a trace!

A disappointed Rui Bing stood before the workshop's entrance as she looked towards the sky in a daze, looking almost infatuated for a moment!

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Out in the wilderness, surrounded by rocks as tall as a few people, scattered across the area to as far as twenty kilometers away.

Ye Chong sat worn-out on the ground, his body all covered in dust from crushed rocks, with Mu staying quietly by his side. Shang knew that he had crossed the line this time, and switched with Mu as soon as he arrived here!

Ye Chong had finished with his berserking, now surrounded by pieces of rock debris. Within twenty meters from Ye Chong, none of the rocks were larger than a meter in girth, as they were all sacrificed for Ye Chong's venting.

Ye Chong felt like he was an unstable stock of fire powder, ready to explode at the slightest provocation!

Ye Chong, who had always had high regard for calmness, hated very much the way he had just lost control of his rational mind, even if his physical abilities were enhanced in various ways under that condition.

Ye Chong smiled wryly at himself. "Mu, I'm in big trouble this time!"

Mu agreed. "That's right, Ye, you're now suppressing your emotions! It looks like women still have the same effect on you!" Mu did not miss the opportunity to mock him.

Ye Chong forced another smile at that. "That damned Shang!" Reflexively, his mind produced an image of the smooth whiteness of skin, the oddly sweet odour that came from it, and the indescribable taste when the tip of his tongue came into contact!

Mu broke his reverie. "Ye, your condition is really not good. There are now two versions of your condition. First is the way your body loses control, but your mind is clear and conscious of the pain! The second version is the way you were over stimulated and lost control like just now. Similarly, you lost bodily control, but in this version, your mind is blurry! The factors that induced the first version is unclear, but from your reaction this time, the second version is clearly triggered by the slightest stimulation. Who could have imagined that Black Cove's silver liquid was so powerful! Of course, that's assuming our assumptions are right!"

Ye Chong had already recovered his usual calm composure. He frowned a little and said, "If it's Black Cove, they must have a way of curing this! But the point is, how can we find out about it?"

Mu replied, "That's right, but based on my calculations, the probability of our successful infiltration into Black Cove is only at 15.6 percent, which is too low. I would not recommended it!"

Ye Chong agreed. "Yeah, that probability is really too low. Sigh, the main issue is, we're too weak, and Mu, you haven't fully recovered yet! It's no different than knocking on death's door! Besides, we're still not sure if this is the work of Black Cove, that's only an assumption of ours!"

For someone like Ye Chong who had grown up on a trash planet, he had a more profound sense of appreciation of life than others.

Perhaps only those who had often encountered situations of life and death could understand the value of life.

Ye Chong continued, "In the short term, there's no way to infiltrate Black Cove!" Ye Chong knew from experience that Black Cove had tight security, and with the current state of Mu and himself, infiltrating would be a fool's errand.

"Hmm, we'll have to wait until we're more powerful to work on Black Cove! However, your weird condition still requires treatment. It seems that we'll have to find an excellent doctor to help you out!" Mu spoke with an undertone of uncertainty.

If Ye Chong was to seek treatment, he would have to leave Blue Ocean. While the planet was prosperous, it was not known for its medical services. Ye Chong quite enjoyed his simple life in Blue Ocean Academy, but what he would really miss was the so-called first class modification workshop and Grandpa Qian!

However, such was life! The usually calm Ye Chong felt overwhelmed with emotions. Without his bidding, the image of that white training garb flashed past his thoughts!

Mu had once again returned to its alternate dimension, and so Ye Chong deployed the Harmony of the Winter Aria and flew towards Blue Ocean Academy.

By the time he had reached the academy grounds, night was already looming. Ye Chong had planned to spend his last night here, and also to give the Harmony a checkup as preparation for his departure tomorrow.

The modification workshop was dark, and Rui Bing seemed to have left. Ye Chong was ready to land when Mu cautioned him, "Ye, be careful, there're enemies inside! 7 mechs!"

Ye Chong was greatly surprised!

# Chapter 93: The Lance in the Darkness

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Seven mechs, all hidden in various corners of the modification workshop. Once he stepped into the workshop, he would be like a caged bird, unable to leave again. If not for Mu, he would probably would have met his end here. However, Mu was by his side, and Ye Chong unemotionally watched as Mu portrayed holographically the locations of the seven mechs!

From this, one can see the difference between the Harmony of the Winter Aria and Mu. Ye Chong's Harmony had not noticed the enemy at all. The workshop's building structure was made of special materials that could block communication signals, and holographic scans of the workshop were impossible. Of course, this was Blue Ocean planet's most advanced modification workshop, and the design was also to protect the workshop and its secrets from outsiders.

Ye Chong had no idea how Mu could have noticed the enemies!

"Mu, you're too powerful!" Ye Chong could not help but sighed, and looked forward to the day he could pilot a mech as good as Mu. That would be the happiest moment of his life! As for Mu, Ye Chong had no intentions of piloting him. While Mu had mentioned before that he would let Ye Chong pilot him if Ye Chong surpassed him in skills, Ye Chong had no doubt that it would be an almost impossible task. More importantly, Ye Chong had never thought of Mu as a mech!

Mu was undeniably powerful, but with the Harmony of the Winter Aria, Ye Chong was not as weak as he was before! Ye Chong could not help but feel a sense of pride!

Since the other party was obviously hostile, he had no reason to hold back!

Ye Chong did not attack immediately, but instead released the five mechanical hummingbirds he had. The hummingbird

scanning system was made up of five blue birds, and they flew quietly into the darkness. Ye Chong waited patiently for information from the hummingbirds. He must first know whether there were any other enemies in hiding outside the workshop. If there were, a quiet escape would be the best strategy for him! Since there was no chance of him defeating everyone here without Mu's help, he would only be wasting his time in combat!

As the five hummingbirds were released, the images that were disrupted by interference signals immediately cleared up, and the scanning coverage was increased! It seemed that the five hummingbirds were indeed useful!

From the hummingbirds' scanning results, it seemed that there were no enemies hidden nearby. While the hummingbird's accuracy and sensitivity within the atmosphere were not as impressive as when the birds were in space, the scanning radius was still up to a good fifty kilometers!

The enemy must have realized the special design of the modification workshop. They were also wary of being noticed if someone was placed outside!

If he left quietly now, it would not be a problem at all. However, Ye Chong was curious to know where the enemies came from, since it would definitely be useful information in the future. If not, he might unknowingly walk into the enemy's trap some day. Besides, Ye Chong believed that even if he could not completely destroy the enemy, he should be able to at least successfully retreat!

Ye Chong also had the intention of testing the true capabilities of the Harmony of the Winter Aria, and his progress so far.

The currently greenish gray mech, the result of Ye Chong's efforts, seemed entirely inconspicuous. Even its metallic gleam was obscured, giving the impression of an aged machine! However the lack of a metallic shine made the Harmony of the Winter Aria even

more concealed in the darkness, nearly unnoticeable!

Harmony of the Winter Aria flew silently like a greenish gray bat towards the modification workshop.

Ye Chong did not choose the main entrance, since it would be the main focus of any enemy attack. If he entered that way, he would be welcomed with a full range of firepower attacks, and all that was left of him would be dust!

Ye Chong carefully circled to the southern side of the workshop. Based on the holographic image, there was a mech standing against the wall in the corner!

Ye Chong's lance, Blue Winter, was 15 meters long, and the wall was about two and a half meters thick. The wall's structural material was mainly a composite of high-strength components, with some anti signal transmission material. However, the latter had no effect on the sturdiness of the walls!

Ye Chong flew to about 800 meters from the workshop, the distance enough to accelerate the Harmony to its maximum speed!

The engines were fully activated! The inconspicuous mech had unsheathed its razor sharp claws. The fifteen-meter long Blue Winter was even taller than the Harmony of the Winter Aria, making the weapon look like an arrow that had just left the bow. The Harmony's wings were folded into its back.

Harmony of the Winter Aria's Mach 7 speed of flight was now unleashed in all its glory!

As the scenery around flashed past him, Ye Chong felt strangely calmed!

The hands wielding the Blue Winter did not even tremble in the slightest! The wall of the workshop was instantly penetrated. The advanced energy feedback mechanism allowed Ye Chong to feel the impact experienced by the lance!

A loud boom reverberated, and the workshop's wall crumbled,

and its fragments flew off in all directions! Ye Chong felt a small pause in the mech's movement, and knew that his attack had hit right on target! Ye Chong was familiar with the insides of the workshop, and knew that the spot he attacked should have been empty. Hence, he must have hit the mech against the wall!

Ye Chong guessed right!

Ye Chong's high speed impact using his lance was terrifyingly powerful! His lance, the Blue Winter, could even penetrate Black Cove's mechs, and this time it offered no mercy to his enemy. The unfortunate mech was instantly in pieces. At the sound of a crash, numerous black fragments flew past Ye Chong!

Ye Chong was shocked - it was a Black Cove mech! Ye Chong was familiar with this kind of black mech! How did they find him?

This was obviously not the time to ask such a question. Ye Chong had no time to think about it, as he swirled and swung off a few fragments hanging off the lance!

The sudden attack threw the enemies into confusion! Ye Chong's ambush had also achieved his aim!

The modification workshop was large, housing a good number of mechs, mech accessories and some modification devices.

The massive Harmony of the Winter Aria moved swiftly like a cat through the workshop!

Suddenly, the workshop's lights were all switched off, and the room was engulfed in darkness!

Ye Chong gave a chilling laugh. In the workshop, all forms of signals were blocked, and they had no means of communicating with each other. "Hehe, this workshop cramped with all kinds of stuff is the perfect battleground for me!" thought Ye Chong. It was him who had destroyed the workshop's lighting!

With Mu along, Ye Chong now held the definitive upper hand. Moreover, his frequent visits here meant that he knew all the



corners of the workshop!

From Mu's holographic image, the crash had invited 3 mechs to fly towards him.

One of the mechs crept slowly towards him. All forms of signals were disabled here, and they had no way of getting in touch with each other. The pilot within the mech began to feel nervous! For a Black Cove elite like him, it had been a long time since he felt like this!

"The damned bastard destroyed the lighting system!" The pilot cursed to himself. However, his training guided him despite his anxiety, and he carefully approached towards the direction of the sound of impact he heard earlier.

Without a holographic scanning system and any lighting, he felt like a blind person, groping his way through the dark, occasionally crashing into something. If not for his skills, he would have tumbled quite a few times! While the mech had laser searchlights, he dared not switch it on. It would be no joke if he activated the searchlight, as he would be the most obvious target, and the first to die in the hands of the enemy!

He was despaired, comforted only the fact the Black Cove mechs were highly durable. This made him brave through his worries and move forward! Up till now, with the exception of the MPA, he had never met any weapon that could be a fatal threat to his mech! This was a great source of comfort for him!

Suddenly, a noise came from the front.

Could it be that his comrades were exchanging blows with the opponent? He decided that it must be so, and immediately rushed towards the source of the sound. He had no time to care for the potential damages to his mech, since Black Cove mechs could not be damaged so easily. He was ready to charge his way through to his destination!

"Hah, I can finally leave this horrible sh\*t place!"

He would give anything to move faster, just a little faster. If two mechs were to work together, he believed that the enemy would not stand a chance!

BANG! His first thought was that he ran into something. Before he could react, the holographic screen before him was crushed, its pieces spraying outwards. A huge, cone-shaped metal appeared before his eyes, and before he could let out a terrified scream, the sharp edge of the cone plunged through his body. BANG! A huge wave of energy passed through him, and he was dismembered into a rain of flesh and blood, flying outwards along with the fragments of his mech. The bits and pieces flew outwards and landed everywhere, followed by a continuous series of splattering sounds.

He never had the chance to realize the cause of his death!

Ye Chong watched with cold eyes, emotionless. When he saw the mech moving quickly towards him, a plan occurred to him, and he held the lance in the trajectory of the mech. Seeing as the mech was still moving quickly, Ye Chong picked up some mech fragment from the floor and threw it behind him!

As expected, upon hearing the fragment landing behind him, the mech moved faster towards him! It ran straight into Blue Winter, which Ye Chong had prepared earlier! Blue Winter, a most powerful weapon due to its Do Kun stone component, penetrated another Black Cove mech without hindrance!

Ye Chong understood the misconception that Black Cove citizens harboured for their mechs! If not for Mu, he would probably be the same as them!

There were still five mechs left!

Ye Chong quietly counted to himself, and silently moved away from his location!

## Chapter 94: Instructor Hak

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Only one mech left. Ye Chong watched the holographic image that Mu transmitted to him, with only one last red dot on it!

Just now, in less than a half minute, Ye Chong had taken advantage of his enemies' blindness and unfamiliarity with the environment, and managed to ambush and kill six of them! Ambushing through the darkness, Ye Chong's Harmony of the Winter Aria was like an assassin of the night, deft and cruel! As for the Blue Winter, an archaic looking lance, Ye Chong now wielded it with ease. The eight moves created by Mu through numerous calculations were twofold in the current situation! Ye Chong hit his targets every single time! Black Cove's most trusted mech armour were as fragile as wafer biscuits before Ye Chong's Blue Winter!

If Ye Chong was compared to the devil from the lowest level of hell, then Blue Winter would be the devil's enormous and sinister looking scythe, covered in blood! Blue Winter's most dangerous part was its tip, and the blades on its two sides were like murder accessories, mostly responsible for tearing apart the opponent's mech!

According to Mu and Shang, the proportion of Do Kun stone in the tip of Blue Winter was far from ideal, but Ye Chong was still very impressed with the weapon's might! What would the Blue Winter be like if the proportion was ideal? Ye Chong could not help but look forward to such a time.

With only the last mech left, Ye Chong approached the enemy with caution!

The mech moved with care, its back against the wall. Unless he moved away, an ambush from the back would be impossible.

Ye Chong was left with the option of closing in from the left. To keep himself unnoticed, the Harmony of the Winter Aria's engines

were running at minimum capacity, as the mech silently closed in onto its target.

It's close! Only twenty meters left! Blue Winter was fifteen meters long. With another ten meters, no, perhaps 8 meters, it would be enough for Blue Winter to tear the enemy apart!

"Right, it's time!" Ye Chong was about to move when something extraordinary happened!

Ye Chong saw a blinding flash of light. The bright light saturating his holographic screen screamed into his eyes and blinded him!

Ye Chong was shocked! He was not, however, panicking. His right hand, ready with Blue Winter, immediately struck out like lightning. If it were anyone else, their first reaction upon being surprised would be to retreat as quickly as possible. However, Ye Chong understood that the better option would be to defend himself by attacking!

DING A metallic ring was heard, and Ye Chong's Blue Winter was obviously blocked by something.

However, this gave enough time for Ye Chong to step back. Once the lance attacked, Ye Chong's hands were already moving deftly across the controls.

Harmony of the Winter Aria moved as though according to plan, riding the backward momentum of the attack and retreating swiftly. The opponent was obviously surprised by Ye Chong's quick reaction!

Ye Chong's vision had now returned to normal!

The opponent must have used something like a flash grenade, and now the entire workshop was lit up. Flash grenades were, in truth, very rarely used nowadays! It seemed to have become a historical relic, both in terms of its function and usage. With the various types of advanced scanning mechanisms available, mechs

could reconstruct images through feedback from the scanning systems, images that were far more detailed than what the human eye could capture. Besides, the effective scanning perimeter of a scanning system in space was far larger than the limits of the human eye!

The most important function of the flash grenade was to provide light for the human eye, but with the advent of improving scanning mechanisms, it was in the awkward position of slowly being replaced.

Ye Chong did not expect his opponent to have something so outdated.

Through the lighting, Ye Chong could not see his opponent's mech clearly.

The mech was thoroughly black, true to Black Cove's style. What surprised Ye Chong was the ancient design of the mech, with obvious Samuel style influence, a popular style from a hundred years back!

There was nothing spectacular about this model of mechs. Even Johansson's mech looked more imposing and menacing. However, Ye Chong dared not underestimate it. Samuel style mechs were also known as battle mechs. Since long range weapons and locking systems were not as impressive as the ones today, these mechs with their ancient duelling attack style were widely popular. However, with the improvements in long range weapons, and a general paradigm shift in mechs, Samuel style mechs eventually declined in numbers.

However, Ye Chong still approved of Samuel style mechs. He had always believed that these mechs were an undying classic, embodying the most fundamental quintessence of battle! The mechs were designed for close range battles, and while they may look plain, a closer inspection of its details in design that would explain its status as a classic!

Samuel style mechs were undeniably the best partner for a pilot skilled in martial arts. However, that was the reason for its declining popularity, since martial arts was also a dying skill!

Black Cove residents were familiar with martial arts, and even Ye Chong learned a few moves from them!

Ye Chong waited, fully alert!

His opponent, however, had no intention of attacking. "Number 58, we meet again!" A man's voice came from the mech, reverberating throughout the workshop!

Ye Chong was taken aback! "Instructor Hak?"

"That's right! It's me!" Number 58, you were under me in Team F, and so the higher ups had asked me to bring you back!" Instructor Hak lowered his voice and said, "Number 58, come with me. The higher ups do not intend to take action against your disobedience. If you run, it'll only be the death of you!"

Ye Chong calmly replied, "Is that so?"

Hak spoke seriously, "You may have killed these few here, but they were only soldiers of the lowest rank from Black Cove! You may be stronger than all of them, but against the soldiers in higher ranks, you're still very weak!" On the deaths of his six comrades, Hak showed no signs of pity.

Ye Chong's voice grew even colder. "Is that so?"

"Come back with me. You're Team F's most talented member in history, and your future is limitless. It's only a matter of time before you make a contract with us! Besides, the higher ups are interested in you, even letting go of your huge mistake. Number 58, this is unprecedented!"

Ye Chong did not even condescend to reply. Will he return to Black Cove, to be the sword in another person's hands? Ye Chong hated feeling restricted. He believed that, even if he was a wild animal, he would still be one that ran freely in the wilderness,

howling without restraint under the night sky! This, as opposed to being leashed on the neck, fitted with steel claws, and tamed as someone's pet!

Besides, he's human!

Hak continued leisurely, "Besides, Number 58, that little something of yours should be reacting about now!"

Ye Chong's expression twisted. "So it's really you!"

Hak was unfazed. "Number 58, the silver liquid was supposedly used to prepare Black Cove soldiers for combat. While it may bring you great pain, as long as you learned the true skills of Black Cove, you'll understand how helpful it can be! It can turn you into the most powerful soldier! However, as you are now, this pain will continue on forever. There will be episodes of it, and you will wish for death instead. Number 58, you must clearly remember this painful experience. It will become more and more painful, until one day you will kill yourself just to stop the pain. There had never been anyone who could live through it!"

Ye Chong eyes slowly narrowed into a slit, thin as the edge of a blade, as he stared dead straight at the mech before him.

If the two of them were to fight hand to hand, Ye Chong would definitely escape. He had personal experience with Hak's weird and powerful martial arts skills, and Ye Chong was certainly no match for it! However, if it was a battle between mechs, Ye Chong was more confident with himself! In terms of the speed of their hands, Hak was definitely slower than him! Besides, a battle between mechs did not involve as much intricacies as a battle between men, and Ye Chong was mostly cautious about Hak's weird martial arts. However, Ye Chong believed Hak could not apply his skills effectively through a mech, thus increasing Ye Chong's chances of winning! Moreover, Ye Chong had full confidence in the Harmony of the Winter Aria!

Still, there were a few things that baffled Ye Chong.

How did Black Cove find him? How did Hak notice him earlier? Ye Chong did not believe that they were the results of coincidences. Why did he not use the flash grenades earlier, but only after the deaths of six of his comrades?

These questions occupied Ye Chong's mind!

Hak smiled, as though he could read his thoughts. "You must be trying to guess how I knew about your ambush!"

Ye Chong was speechless, only unemotionally observing the mech on his holographic screen.

"Since I'm your instructor, let me teach you a little something. The six senses of an ancient martial arts practitioner are very sensitive. Even though the mech's scanning is useless, I could still hear things! Of course, that can't happen through the mech's sound conduction device! Earlier, I had opened the door of the pilot's cabin. While your Harmony of the Winter Aria's engine was quiet, it was still easy for me to pinpoint your location! Do you not want to learn skills like these? Are you not interested in becoming more powerful? Number 58, come back with me to Black Cove! Over there, you can become stronger!" Hak's final sentences were full of enticement.

Ye Chong now realised his methods, and the sheer brilliance of it! However, with regards to his last few sentences, Ye Chong had no reaction to them at all. Instead, he quietly pressed a few controls.

"Hmm, how does he know the name of my mech?" Ye Chong felt unsure.

Hak suddenly asked a question out of the blue, "Number 58, based on our information, you're called Ye Chong here, your family name ..."

Before Hak could finish, a silver line drew towards his chest, an attack not forewarned!



# Chapter 95: Confrontation

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Hak's voice was cut off, but Ye Chong's blow was also blocked!

Hak was extremely wary against Ye Chong. In Black Cove, the young man was strong and improved quickly, both a shock to Hak! Ye Chong's speed with his hands were also the fastest he had ever seen. While that alone was not everything, but it was undeniably a very important skill to unleash the maximum battling potential of a mech! Besides, Ye Chong's strong physique was also better than Hak's, and that meant Ye Chong could perform more complicated and demanding movements, allowing one to gain a preemptive strike in battle. In Black Cove, physical training was also one of their core trainings!

Now, Hak could only hope that Ye Chong was not too skilled in mech piloting!

Ye Chong's surprise attack was easily countered by an anticipatory Hak! Hak was also vexed by the current situation. He was ordered by the higher ups to bring Number 58 back without harming him, but Ye Chong's strength made it impossible for him guarantee that. If the two of them were about equally matched, it would be more difficult to capture the other alive than to kill him. As it was, the higher ups had insisted of him bringing Number 58 in one piece! Hak speculated that Number 58 could be the son of Black Cove's leader!

If not for Number 58's cold nature, Hak would have done what Ji Shangyan did, threatening him with the old man Qian. However, Hak expected that with Number 58's personality, he would not have placed any importance in the old man's life. It would have been a wasted effort, alerting his opponent and dashing any hopes for an ambush!

However, he did not expect Ye Chong to notice their ambush and returned their favour instead!

"A real talent, this b\*stard!"

Ye Chong did not hesitate. He expected the lance to be blocked, and so the Harmony of the Winter Aria swirled, and another cold gleam reached for Hak! Hak dared not be negligent, his right fist blocked and swung, and the cold gleam rapidly faded!

Besides its unique design, Hak's mech was actually quite average. Only its two fists were fitted with barbs, occasionally flashing menacingly during the fight, and no other weapons were visible on the mech. However, the elbows were clearly layered for extra thickness, and the short and thick barbs did not shine dangerously as it would have, entirely inconspicuous!

Ye Chong did not falter. Hak's admirable battling techniques were not new to Ye Chong, since he had seen them before on Black Cove! If Hak performed badly in mech piloting, Ye Chong would be surprised!

The green and black mechs confronted each other!

The first to strike would be advantageous! Ye Chong side-stepped and quickly pointed Blue Winter lightning towards Hak's mech. The cold gleam from the tip of the lance drew a chilling silver arc in the air! His basic training was already part of him, and the few side-steps he took was almost flawless.

Hak saw the Harmony of the Winter Aria's seemingly plain footwork and could not help but be impressed. As good as he was in battling, he could see the quality of the steps. If it was his own body, he could do it even better, but through a mech, he could only realise his own incompetence! However, Ye Chong's seemingly frightening attack with the lance did not faze him. While it seemed threatening, Hak had a few moves up his sleeves to counter it! As he saw it, Ye Chong's lance techniques and his footwork were at far too different levels!

Hak's mech was called Kai, and it had been with him for two decades. After so many years, it was almost a part of Hak himself.

Kai stepped back quickly, barely avoiding Ye Chong's strike with his lance. The cold gleam from the tip of Blue Winter swiped past the mech, millimeters from its surface.

Harmony of the Winter Aria turned, and Blue Winter made an impossible twist in the air before charging towards Kai's abdomen.

Kai's left arm lowered, connecting obliquely with the side of Blue Winter, as Blue Winter was repelled back upwards! Ye Chong was surprised, not expecting Hak's inconspicuous mech to have such strong arms! Ye Chong went with the flow of movement and blocked a fist coming towards him with the handle of the lance!

The punch was strong, such that if Ye Chong had not commanded the Harmony to hold a tighter grip on Blue Winter, it would probably go flying!

Before Ye Chong could react any further, he suddenly felt the world spin, and Hak's mech was getting further and further away from him! It was only then that he realised that Kai had sneaked in a kick on him! A rising fighting spirit was evident in Ye Chong's eyes!

What great strength! Ye Chong guessed that Hak's mech must have been strengthened extensively to fit his combat style!

The photon processor sounded a piercing alarm, indicating that the kick had caused significant damage to Harmony of the Winter Aria. Ye Chong was astonished to find that he did not even realize when the kick was made! What commendable techniques!

Ye Chong's hands moved swiftly across the controls like smoke, issuing a series of commands!

Harmony of the Winter Aria's engines roared to life, and the mech somersaulted gracefully midair in an arc, steadying itself before landing! Hak was not surprised that Ye Chong did not fall to the ground, it was only natural given the speed of Ye Chong's hands. Hak maneuvered Kai deftly, and before Ye Chong could

barely steady himself, a fist flew towards Ye Chong, fast as a comet!

His lance sprang to life, as Blue Winter moved like a venomous serpent, hissing with its forked tongue!

Hak was mildly surprised that Ye Chong could use the lance so well, and greatly admired his ability to adapt to various situations! One should know that using something like the archaic lance required special techniques; in the hands of someone ignorant, it would be no more useful than a metal pole! However, the weapon was already long gone in history, and even in Black Cove, where expert fighters were abound, few used a lance as their mech's weapon!

Without much time to spare, Kai crossed its arms to shield its vulnerabilities!

"Blocking it, are you?" Ye Chong smiled coldly to himself!

DING! Blue Winter's tip landed squarely on its opponent for the very first time!

His expectation of the lance penetrating the mech entirely was unmet, as Blue Winter only penetrated halfway through one of Kai's arms! Ye Chong suddenly realised that Hak's mech must have gone through a special strengthening process! Ye Chong immediately reacted by retreating with his lance, putting a distance between him and Kai!

Hak was completely astonished! He could barely believe that there was still a weapon that could damage his mech like that! His astonishment quickly turned into anger, as Kai had never been damaged in the 20 years of their partnership. He did not expect to receive such humiliation from the little b\*stard today!

Hak's face darkened instantly!

Ye Chong watched Hak's mech coldly, without any emotions! He knew that he had just lost the perfect opportunity just now, and

Hak would not let his mech and Blue Winter come into direct contact again. With his skills, that was entirely possible!

By now, Ye Chong felt icy calm!

Harmony of the Winter Aria suddenly accelerated to its maximum speed, and Ye Chong charged towards Hak with Blue Winter in hand! Based on his experience, if his attack was on target this time, he will be able to fully penetrate Kai! The high speed impact would increase its usual destructive effect by a few magnitudes!

Hak may be furious, but he did not lose his rational mind. He knew that he could not afford to receive the incoming attack. He gauged the direction of the lance and twisted his body, barely escaping the tip of the weapon!

As Ye Chong was about to rush past Hak, Ye Chong gave a cold laugh, and his hands flew across the controls!

The double-folded wings on the back of Harmony of the Winter Aria suddenly expanded!

The sharp edges of the wings cut like blades, and after some strengthening treatment, the wings were as sharp as alloy daggers! Harmony of the Winter Aria's could go up to Mach 7! The shrieking sound of air rushing past the edges was terrifying! Hak immediately realized the danger it posed!

There was a loud sound of impact! Kai took a few steps backwards, a long gash on its chest, cracks forming around it like spiderwebs!

Ye Chong was also doing no better, the powerful impact breaking the wing upon contact. Even though Ye Chong expected it, he was still tossed to a far corner, and it took him great effort to stabilize himself. The photon processor's alarm blared in full party mode!

Hak was now feeling terribly unpleasant! He was obviously stronger than Ye Chong, but had instead took damage from his

opponent. The attacks were also vicious and cunning, which annoyed Hak very much, as though he had just swallowed a fly! Besides, this was someone whom he was teacher to! His beloved mech of twenty years was not seriously damaged, but how could he not be furious about it?

Hak's expression grew even darker! His eyes looked as though they could spit fire!

Ye Chong could only smile wryly. He had no other way of fighting, since they were too equally matched! He could only sacrifice a bit of himself to cause greater damage on his opponent! He did not expect Hak to apply his combat skills in mech piloting!

Ye Chong also finally understood that Hak's application of his combat techniques in mech piloting was still meager compared to others, but when using it against him, it was more than enough!

Ye Chong could not help but began to consider the option of escaping! If he escaped now, what were his odds of success?

From the performance of Hak's mech, its engines were definitely on par with the Harmony of the Winter Aria's. If he escaped now, the mech would definitely follow him closely like an annoying fly. Besides, who was to say that they had no other comrades further out? If they had comrades, then the one to falter first would be himself! Him being surrounded and annihilated would be a certainty!

Ye Chong considered the matter, as his eyes unknowingly began to fixate on Kai's engines!

# Chapter 96: Survival

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There were 3 engines located within Samuel in total - one of them was placed beneath the abdomen along with the others at the outer thighs being the supportive engines. This is one distinct design that made the Samuel style mechs identifiable.

Ye Chong was bothered however. While the Blue Winter turned out to be quite a remarkable ranged weapon and the "marksmanship" of lances taught by the great Mu was impeccable on both paper and performance, Ye Chong felt uneasy conducting his fight in this way. It did not feel as comfortable as brandishing cutters like the magnetic blade or the flaming sword. He was fond of the close-combats as if he was born for them.

Despite all that, Blue Winter the lance remained glued in his hands. It was a good weapon anyway, that Ye Chong would not let go this quickly. The uneasiness holding a foreign weapon had disintegrated into a mere preference of weaponry the moment he witnessed the capability of Blue Winter in that fight with 6 men before. Its offenses were of a perfect score. Even if it were to impale Hak's mech, it would an effortless attempt to inflict actual damage. Other than the Blue Winter, there were a few other weapons in Harmony, but Ye Chong had yet to test their capabilities.

He clenched his teeth as he launched the mech to propel. Harmony of the Winter Aria skipped its way like a bird with a broken wing - clumsily and tactlessly.

Kai stomped onto the ground as it bent its body like a drastically pressed spring under Hak's command.

The energy accumulated over time was unleashed, as Kai blasted off like an unstoppable bullet right towards Ye Chong.

Kai zoomed past Ye Chong. "That was very fast!" Ye Chong exclaimed that there was hardly time for him to react! Hak picked

such a precise timing to strike back right when Ye Chong was withdrawing the lance. As long as Kai got close enough to this nuisance before him, he would be able to taste victory fairly soon.

Wham!

Ye Chong felt as if he would spit splats of blood in no time at this rate. Hak's timing manipulation was flawless, and that was discomfoting to Ye Chong.

One of the pair of wings on Harmony was truly broken and it had negatively affected the overall balance in travels. Not only that, the aerodynamic of the mech had been disrupted, making it difficult to control! That was why Ye Chong hated unnecessary spreading wings on a mech.

Droplets of sweat rolled over his forehead one after another. He had achieved the maximum speed of his hands on the control panel!

Ye Chong's Harmony grabbed the lance in the right and backed off speedily, at an attempt to keep a distance from the terrorizing enemy. Ye Chong was too occupied to pull off a fight. A large amount of input was allocated on the balancing of the mech by making tiny adjustments in its positioning using the supportive engines.

Even though Ye Chong tried to maintain a distance between them, Hak had already been absolutely enraged by that moment. Till the final blow he made, his mind was engrossed by the rages after what Ye Chong had done on his mech, while the clear order of bringing Ye Chong in one piece by Black Cove authority echoed.

Providing Ye Chong was still breathing after the fight, with the help of current medical technology, it would not be challenging to make Ye Chong return in whole piece, no matter how injured he was. Hak trashed his concern away as he made up his mind to give this kiddo a "proper lesson"... of life, of course.



This was the moment when Instructor Hak demonstrated his unrivaled skills. Kai moved energetically like an actual living thing in spite of the major injury under his control. Ye Chong was utterly cornered!

Instructor Hak snickered as his eyes glowed coldly at the ancient lance which started to wield slower. If it was not this spear which made him to act cautiously, the kiddo would have been lying on the ground way back! The Ji family was potent enough to produce such a high-leveled craft even at this decade. Hak was stupefied at first glance. That mech would be some juicy details to be included in his report when he went back... with Ye Chong, needless to say!

Although Kai was made out of the classic Samuel's design in the past, it had undergone several rounds of heavy modification accomplished by the ace technicians at Black Cove. Practically speaking, other than the appearance and placement of the main components being similar to the old-fashioned Samuel style, it was literally a brand new mech inside the body. These upgrades were made compatible with Hak's powerful unarmed combat skills.

Harmony was immediately in grave danger as Kai inched forward.

With such a fearsome velocity, Ye Chong's new toy had somehow become a burden to his fight. The Blue Winter, a compelling lance it might be, was still a slow weapon in comparison to such a mighty opponent.

The instructor sneered slightly as he knew what Ye Chong would do. Most of the kiddo's attacks, counterattacks were from the his lecture back at the Black Cove and those were nothing against his techniques. Hiya! A left crush from Kai's left shoulder, the Harmony's balance went crumpled as its body swung consecutively. Ye Chong's hands hurriedly stormed upon the control panel again as he inputted the command, hoping to regain balance in time. Seeing Ye Chong acting in such a panic, the instructor was joyful. Hak watched his opponent carefully.

"There!" Kai's left arm was raised a little, putting itself into a stance. Shush! Bang! The Blue Winter came piercing underneath of Kai's left arm, tightly like a sword back into its sheath. As if he was prepared for the incoming attack the whole time, Hak predicted the attack and obviously he did not give the kiddo a chance to land a counterattack. Klink! Kai's left arm gripped the lance tightly and the right fist struck upon the Harmony right after.

The metallic fist glossed in the dark with the spikes spreading out.

The punch was unavoidable even with Ye Chong's hacking speed of his hand movements. It would be impossible to dodge the punch fully, considering how the major parts of Harmony were within its range of attack. Even if he turned his engines to the maximum, it would be too late for him to dodge.

It was probably the end of Ye Chong's adventure.

He lost.

...as if.

Out of a sudden, a glaring white light flashed before him. Without forewarning, Hak's eyes squinted due to the scorching light. A rumble resounded right after the punch landed as the mech shook a little by the recoil. The processor of his mech then started wailing its alarm menacingly.

Boom! A loud explosion followed at the end of rumble.

When Hak's sight had recovered from the glaring light after a moment, he could only see a huge dent on the wall before him. The target was nowhere to be seen!

The alarm was still ringing in the cabin madly. Hak had no idea what had just happened. He tried moving his mech but he failed! For some reasons, Kai could not move! He looked at the interface as the processor prompted, "System Failure - Main Engine Severely Damaged - Inspecting - Mobility: Negative! Mobility: Negative!"

The bloody red wording peered into his eyes.

In the meantime, Ye Chong had escaped. Yes, like a coward, he ran away gracelessly.

Ye Chong let off a bitter laugh as he stared upon the torn Harmony of the Winter Aria. After all those efforts he put in renovating this beauty, the former elegance was utterly wiped. It looked like trash that could go straight to the recycling center!

The last blow was delivered successfully. The armor of Harmony took the spikes of Kai's fist like how Kai chewed on the Blue Winter's impale. It landed a critical hit. There was no plot twist to save Ye Chong. If it was not under an order to bring Ye Chong back alive, the fist would have hit right into the cabin and even a titan like Ye Chong would die in a whimper.

Ye Chong's mood was brightened knowing how he was still alive. And thinking back how he was still able to make a comeback so gorgeously - the usual indifferent he could not help but to smile slightly.

After Ye Chong had planned to escape, he rushed towards Kai's engines. No matter how much the Samuel mechs were overhauled, the placement of the engines would never be changed. Ye Chong, the mod expert pinpointed such flaw at first look.

Back when Harmony was still under the modification process, Ye Chong had sneaked the laser sword within its right hand. The laser sword would not reveal its blade when unactivated. So anyone would hardly notice the remaining handle inside the palm. It was an exceptional stealth and quite a dirty trick too! Ye Chong did not use this killer-move right away simply because he could not foresee whether a laser-based cutter could deal with such fatal damage to a mech from Black Cove. He gambled once and of course he won. Apparently, laser swords worked on Black Covers' mechs like wonders. He was not sure how much damage he had inflicted exactly, but seemingly Hak did not come after him straightaway.

That would be more than enough to justify the significant damage he had done. Well, he speculated so.

Back at the climax of their battle, Ye Chong decided to drop the lance and activated the laser sword. Harmony lifted the sword and made an upper slash - a seamless chain of action, so fast it even shocked an experienced killer like Hak, all thanks to Ye Chong's amazing speed. That glaring light that blinded Hak was actually the beam of Ye Chong's laser sword upon its activation!

Nonetheless, the Harmony had been torn into junks, while the Blue Winter had gone into the enemy's hands. It was another horror story for Ye Chong to imagine if he could escape Black Cove's hunting. Hak was not the first one who came after him, and certainly he would not be the last. The Black Cove seemed to be very keen in taking Ye Chong down. Hence, anyone could guess the fight had not ended yet.

Sigh...

"Ye, that was rather incredible!" Mu's voice rang suddenly.

"Incredible? I almost got myself killed!" replied Ye Chong and he laughed bitterly.

"It is incredible!" Mu explained, "The probability of your victory would be a measly 8%, whereas the probability of a successful escape would be 33%. In the end, you went after that 33% chance instead."

Ye Chong's lips twitched as he spoke, "Mu, if you did try to be helpful just now, taking down that guy would have been a piece of cake. For real. I was almost pounded into a pancake and yet Mu, you actually sat back and did nothing?"

"You are right," replied Mu. "However the catch is, I would provide my assistance only when the probability of your survival goes below 15%."

"And why is that so?" Ye Chong snorted.

"Based on the reading I had obtained from previous researches, under such circumstance humans would most likely unleash their potential. Moreover, a pilot would be required to take on countless occasions of such kind to become the true pilot! Since you happened to be the owner of both Shang and I, it is essential to make you the strongest pilot!" Though Mu's reasoning went flat and calm as if describing something trivial, there was a hint of dignity in his speech which made Ye Chong lowered his eyes in disgrace.

Anyone would have assumed that Mu was being harsh and unsympathetic, but this was reasonable to Ye Chong. Mu shared some points and he deeply understood every bit of it. It was his own life, of course he would be the one to fight for it. Back at Trash Planet-12, Ye Chong spent his life growing on the belief that one would always be the one to manipulate one's own fate. The relationship between Mu and Ye Chong might be of a brotherly love and a mutual trust, yet Ye Chong never expected Mu's protection as a form of duty or responsibility. If Mu helped out, without a doubt Ye Chong would express gratitude. If Mu decided not to however, Ye Chong would not whine about Mu's "irresponsibility". It was not his responsibility to protect, nevertheless, it was his responsibility to train! Ye Chong knew Mu well enough that he knew whatever Mu did was for his own good. Only one would become a true warrior after countless dead-or-alive battles.

Was there nothing Ye Chong could rely on?

No, there wasn't.

To Ye Chong, he knew he could best rely on his own strength.

"Also, I was recording the opponent's data during the battle. His battle style was rather intriguing. The final result would be released after some data analysis," Mu carried on his speech.

"Right," Ye Chong nodded in strong approval from his

experience. "Not only it is intriguing, but also strong. Very strong! But hey, Mu, don't you think our first priority for now is to plan a runaway from the Blue Ocean?"

"Correct," Mu agreed. "We would need a spaceship."

# Chapter 97: Blue Ocean Runaway

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At the passageway for spacecrafts, Ye Chong hid at the corner with his eyes focused on the path as he discovered the substantial increase in the number of cops. He frowned slightly, wondering if the police force was in cahoots with the Black Covers. If that was the case, Black Cove was truly meant for retrieval this time as they actually took the trouble to gang up with the security force just to prevent Ye Chong from running away easily. Without a spacecraft, he would not be able to perform a space warp. Even if he were to use a master-craft like Mu to run away without leaping through the space-time continuum, it would be far-fetched for him to fly beyond the proximity of the police force, since eventually, a few hundred thousands or even millions of kilometers were considered a pathetic length in the boundless universe.

Despite being drastically outnumbered by his foes, Ye Chong trusted his strength. It would not be that difficult to infiltrate the area. "Let's do this!" Ye Chong was going to lift his steps, then his eyes discerned something - a number of mechs from the Black Cove lurking at an overlooked corner, coveting their prey to fall in.

The idea was scrapped.

That would not work! Ugh, such a pain in the head! Even if I did manage to sneak in, it would be pointless if I could not launch the flight promptly. Any spacecraft would be as slow as a snail without performing space-warping in comparison with the mechs. With those Black Covers' mechs at the corner, launching a flight promptly would be just a dream! A wild dream! He would be shot into a beehive before he could even boot the engines.

He then wondered if he could catch one of the spacecrafts taking off being that uninvited guest to the flight and escape.

Sadly, there was no miracle for Ye Chong that day.

He peeked for quite a while but there was simply no spacecraft

taking off.

"Ye," Mu's voice broke the silence. "Let's just go. The spacecrafts are not flying here anytime soon."

"What do you mean... Oh!" Ye Chong was dumbfounded as he figured out what Mu probably had meant. "Mu, don't tell me they are actually holding back all the spacecrafts here? But wouldn't this cause a mess at the port or something?"

"Look at this," Mu explained as he read on the extract.

"According to the latest news at the center, the local government of the Blue Ocean Planet has validated the possible infection of the virus, Charles-II. As stated by the 'Treaty of uncommon and dangerous microorganism spread-control in the 5 galaxies', any flight beyond the planet would be forbidden from today onwards. In addition, all residents are strongly advised to perform a body checkup at any local hospital or temporary inspection center in the following 3 days. This is to ensure your safety and others. As reported, reinforcement would arrive to provide assistance to the local police forces for the time being. In addition, please make sure that everyone of your family and friends had performed their checkups. If not, please do advise them to do so immediately. If they are showing resistance, kindly contact your nearest police station for not only your safety but your family's..."

Wow, such coincidence, of all times a virus could have appeared. Ye Chong was troubled.

This was more than a mere coincidence! This couldn't be a coincidence! If this is some dangerous Charles virus actually thrashing mankind, then what were those Black Covers doing with their killing machines here? Were they... Were they here for me?

Ye Chong speculated so unconvincingly. Though feeling unconvinced, whatever he had deduced made more sense as he thought over time.



"Mu, do you think they are here for us?" asked Mu.

"As shown in my data, the probability is roughly between 72% and 76%," Mu stated calmly.

It was puzzling for Ye Chong. Assuming there would be no spacecraft for him to hop on, his mobility would be severely limited while it would only be a matter of time before he got cornered and there would not be another plot twist for him by then. Game over. However, Ye Chong was bothered as he felt something amiss. While the Black Cove took such a hassle to get him, the FMPA did not seem to have initiated anything - they were quiet, too quiet. Ye Chong did not bet his life on them though. It was just a glimpse of speculation flashing in his head.

How should I get away with this? Ye Chong cracked his head thinking.

"Ye!" Mu's voice echoed. "Go to the north of Jesha zone, the place where you did your training. Take care and stay low."

Ye Chong was more than merry to hear the instruction from Mu knowing that Mu must have gotten some brilliant idea for his escape! As he finally got a plan, time had elevated as his primary concern. "There's no time to waste." He sneaked out of the passageway and hit the street. He lowered his body as he weaved through the crowds. Soundlessly he hastened his journey to north. The Harmony of the Winter Aria had already been kept back to the alternate dimension. He would not be foolish enough to deploy such a badly damaged piece of mech in the public. A mech this broken would only be much more outstanding than a potential outlaw like Ye Chong!

The number of police officers on the street had blatantly increased. They patrolled the area and scanned for suspicions among the pedestrians from time to time. Fortunately, Ye Chong was more than familiar with this game of urban jungle escape after an epic chase on the mech one after another. Additionally, Mu

provided pointers on spot regarding his motion - whether to stop at one point or to move straightaway to the alley; whether to take a look into the window pretending shopping or to take the corner at the store. A moment later, Ye Chong had arrived at the forbidden flight zone without much trouble.

It was the same old place he knew - a deserted desert, with veils of sandstorm, darkness and fuzzy vision on both naked and mechanical eyes.

"So... Mu, you have brought me here." Ye Chong asked out of curiosity, "Does that mean you found a spacecraft here?"

"Nope."

"Then why are we here?" Ye Chong questioned in confusion.

To travel this desert zone, Ye Chong had to deploy Harmony. Tick! He slid into his cabin and activated the interface. Harmony did not seem to be in a good shape, as anyone could tell. Hak's final blow to Harmony was mortal, with the spikes skimming inches away from Ye Chong's cabin. If Hak did intend to kill, Ye Chong would have been dead. And if the spikes of Kai's fist was much broader, the mech would be permanently beyond repair.

Beep.

Ye Chong was still able to boot the engines! Apparently, the circuits were not overly damaged. It looked like Ye Chong had not run out of luck, even though the energy remained in the battery was pitifully scarce after that much struggle - only about half was left.

Ye Chong browsed through the projected news on the processor from Mu.

"As specified by the original schedule, Fred the Great who has been on a galactic tour would be making his arrival at Blue Ocean Planet in 3 days time. Report shows that Fred the Great would also be stopping by the planet for about 7 days. He would be visiting

some well-known scenic spots and give a talk at Blue Ocean Academy on the very last day. Based on what the great one had told, apparently the aim of his tour this time is to look for inspiration..."

"And that is the news from 2 days ago," Mu spoke stilly.

Ye Chong's eyes lustered, "That means, he would be arriving in a day?"

"Mhm, if it is a day away..." He did not wait for Mu to answer as he began plotting, "That means he's close enough for us to work on something... First we could pilot a mech to leave Blue Ocean Planet then we hijack his ride. After that, we could go wherever we want from there!"

"But wait..." Ye Chong knotted his brows. There was a catch it seemed, "That dude we are dealing with did not look like any folk from the street. I think it's still quite hard for me to actually hijack a huge spacecraft with a mech alone, especially when Harmony seemed pretty busted at this instance."

"Alone? Are you alone?" Mu rebutted.

"Who else?" Ye Chong was bewildered, "Who else would there be? Is there anyone else? Oh, Mu, you are telling me that you are finally making a debut?" Ye Chong could not believe what a crazy assumption he had just made. It had been quite some time since Mu helped him out directly after leaving Trash Planet-12.

"Well." Mu worded with no emotions, "I had performed calculations on the data available. With the current condition of Harmony and you, the possibility of hijacking a spacecraft successfully alone would be less than 15%. That includes the chances of you acting up out of sudden during the operation. After much consideration, this would be the correct move to the situation."

"Right..." Taking his current condition into account, he agreed

that Mu's decision was undeniably the best. His mind relaxed as he thought about Mu's full participation in the big escape this time. Confidence went inflating in him uncontrollably. Was there anything in this world that would hinder the great Mu?

He took the suggestion to heart yet he did not make his move right away. Instead, he took a look around Harmony, just to make sure nothing could go wrong on his side or even if something would, Harmony could still arm itself to fight. And he blasted off through the fluttering shrouds of dust particles into the sky!

The heavy sandstorm and thrashing turbulence were the treacherous signs for this zone, which however had become an unbeatable camouflage for Ye Chong and Mu!

The anti-detection system in Harmony might not be as overpowered as those from the Black Coves, yet it still was an exceptional device. It was a mech secret in production by the Ji family after all. It was outstanding compared to those junks at the flea market!

...

Hak glanced at the scratches on Kai sympathetically. It was not bad but it was irritating to Hak. The scratches were not an issue, the engines were however. They were exclusive to the Black Covers and could only be fixed at the Black Cove. Hak would have to make his travel back to the Black Cove if he wanted to carry on his hunt. At the moment he could do nothing but to look at his mech in blank dismay.

No. 58 was no doubt a terrifying character indeed!

Hak had brought 10 men from Black Cove this time and he had lost 6 of them in between. It sounded like a painful loss but Hak only expressed an uprising cunningness in his eyes towards the 6 men's death. "Hehe... it did work out my way." Johansson's death was heartbreaking enough for him to stone upon in the next few moments, since he was the strongest man other than No.58 in the

F group of his. Well, it did turn out to be the happiest news to the other groups.

None of the 6 men were from the F group. However, they were outsourced from the other groups, taking into consideration that there was nobody in the F group who was capable enough to join this operation after Johansson's death. Hak wanted to do something in the dark to take out a few of these outsourced obstacles in the team, just to knock down the other groups for his own benefits. Taking members of the other groups out equals to better chances of his Group-F excelling! His wish was granted but he never expected No.58 to be this potent to take out 6 of them at once. If Hak was able to get him back to the Black Cove, then F group would be... and then he would be ... Hehehehehehehehehehehehe...

The scheme set off blazing in his heart!

A knock on the door interrupted the nasty plot in his mind. Oh yeah, he was staying with the Ji family. Hak formerly held no impression towards the Ji family other than being a leech to the Black Cove's authority, but he was very much impressed this time by the surprises. The Ji family was much more formidable than he thought. The 2 mechs Ji family had crafted were about the average level of a standard mech at the Black Cove, with a few perks that the Black Cove could not compete at that moment - that lance for instance!

And it was also because of the Ji family's involvement in most of the activities this time around that No.58's escape route was restricted using the forces of the local government on Blue Ocean, making him a fish ready to be netted. Moreover, it held those meddling pilots from FMPA from taking any reckless action. "Impressive..." Hak took back his disdain towards the Ji family.

"Come in," he shouted at the door.

It was Ji Shangyan who came to him. Hak was expressing much

admiration and respect towards this fine young man. Not only he had menacing plots in his head, he was also a terrifically terrible character. A bad man to the core! One of his recent plots was the virus news. It worked like a charm.

"Shangyan?" Ji Shangyan was looking bad on his face as Hak asked grimly, "What happened? Shangyan!" Unlike most young men out there, Ji Shangyan was a courteous boy, even towards a uncle-nephew relationship, which was very pleasing to Hak.

"Uncle Hak..." His voice came weakly, "We tried... we tried to retrieve something potentially useful from that Ye Chong guy's identity card but the result was shocking..."

"Oh? What is it?" Hak was intrigued.

"Every single bit of his information on the virtual networking system was gone... That includes his every record in the academy, which has been erased. We can't even find any photographic reference of his now. Everything was wiped..." he laughed bitterly.

"Ah!" Hak screamed uncontrollably, "It can't be!"

...

"Heh..." Dodging the patrolling mech in the sky of Blue Ocean cautiously, Ye Chong's mech had better dexterity and velocity in smaller scope of travel. The hummingbirds were an additional surprise to Ye Chong's journey. 5 hummingbird-detectors added could radically enlarge the range and accuracy of detection of Harmony! It also allowed stealth-mode detection too. Ye Chong believed that this was the most successful design added to the Harmony other than Blue Winter the lance.

He looked at the visuals projected in the hologram coming from the hummingbirds and gasped!

# Chapter 98: All Aboard!

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A gigantic spacecraft flew at high speed in the sky. It was such a breathtaking sight, an impulsive view of a powerful contrast. Imagine it - a whale of a size of a small mountain slamming its body right onto you, with the shadow of its body engulfing you completely and one could stop breathing, one's heart could stop beating by then! Ye Chong was assured that this was by far the most enormous spacecraft he had ever encountered - it was colossal, so colossal that a great mech would feel as minuscule as a mosquito hovering before it.

Beep!

The hummingbirds transferred some data to the interface. "Oh my Fal-" Ye Chong was utterly stunned. His could hardly shut his mouth as the data illustrated the length of the spacecraft - head to tail, a whopping 10 kilometers.

"Is... Is this even a spacecraft?"

A length about 10 kilometers might have sounded grand to a caveman like Ye Chong. Little did Ye Chong know that there was actually a variety for spacecraft models. Depending on the model, the size varied. A prime example would be the spacecraft Ye Chong spotted in the space. As a matter of fact, the spacecraft was a Slan-graded premium spacecraft which would only be produced under special request pre-orders. One could never see a finished Slan grade spacecraft in the normal market. As astronomical as its size, its price was of a whopping length and without a doubt it was not something even the so-called millionaires could purchase on a whim.

A Slan spacecraft might not be the most advanced kind in the universe, however undeniably there was no other spacecraft that could compete its premium coziness, as if it was a flying palace in the space.

The outer appearance was demurely elegant. In spite of its overwhelming size, the details of every single inch of the design was not disregarded, presenting an exceptional standard of craftsmanship.

Being the first time encountering such a giant in the space, it was mind-blowing and eye-opening to Ye Chong. His brain was unable to perceive such huge amount of shock and was jammed for the moment.

"Mu...Mu... Is this really a spacecraft?" muttered Ye Chong.

"Certainly," Mu replied without hesitation.

"Are you sure we could hijack such a whale with only two of us? How should we get in? The armor is at least a hundred meter thick. It's impossible for us to break in!" Although Mu was the guarantee to the operation, Ye Chong was shaken by the size of this thing.

"Ye, one's capability does not share a consequential relationship with one's size! It is not strenuous to hijack or even to destroy it. Speaking from a theoretical approach, there is nothing truly invincible in this world," Mu replied indifferently.

"Really?" Ye Chong was skeptical about it. "Well... It's not like I have any other better ideas to get through this giant's armor..."

However, Mu disagreed, "The relationship between the thickness of an armor and the possibility of successful hijacking does not show a valid *modus ponens*! Smashing an armor to seize control of the entire craft is merely a method of pure violence and also a manifestation of strength under low-intelligence. Take note that the strength mentioned does not solely define one's vigor."

"Oh I see..." Ye Chong seemed to have gotten it somehow... "Ah!" A sudden realization struck Ye Chong, "Does that mean the method of 'threatening' Shang had taught me before was a form of manifestation too?"



"You are correct. That resides in the field of psychology. Shang is knowledgeable at it, which is one of the reasons that explains a more developed mood matrix in comparison to me."

"I still prefer the to act straightforward, being concise and simple. These are a little complicated for me to understand," confessed Ye Chong. To a big fan of nature's law of survival like Ye Chong, these techniques were truly more problematic to understand.

"These tactics are faster and more effective than pure violence, which is something important you need to learn in future. In spite of my understanding on these philosophies being unnecessary to a pilot like you, Shang showed perseverance to educate you on these. Judging by the situation now, clearly Shang's suggestion is right." Mu answered in a serious tone.

As Shang was mentioned, it was both funny and annoying to Ye Chong. Shang was such a respectable character yet he just did not want to put up a respectable behavior. A curiosity arose out of the blue, "If you were Mu, what tactic do you think he would use to fulfill our goals?"

"Negative. Insufficient information. Unable to perform a calculation," answered Mu.

Well, Harmony of the Winter Aria surely had some really good anti-detection system. They had been traveling by the giant for quite a while yet they were never detected. This again flaunted the strength of the Ji family. They were one of the 4 aristocratic families for a reason. But for Mu, Ye Chong wondered if a detection system that could work against him had been invented.

The 2 hovering mechs wavered like 2 mosquitos surrounding a massive sleeping beast.

"So what tactics are you going to use?" Ye Chong asked on behalf of his overflowing curiosity. Mu had been holding back the details for long enough to thirst Ye Chong into desperation.

"Based on our current condition..." Mu began, "Assuming we were to break this armor directly with brutal force, the possibility would only be 2.5% and below - you can safely presume that as 'impossible'. Hence, as my forte is performing calculation while having greater influences in the virtual network and all the controlling network in the processors of the spacecrafts is interconnected with the multi-channeled signal system. Furthermore I also happened to have a multi-channeled signal transmitter, with the nature being interconnected with the system, I could hack into the main processor of the spacecraft to seize the control of the entire unit," explained Mu.

After that much of explanation, it was then Ye Chong recalled the fact that Mu was a top wrecking maverick in the virtual web who had once destroyed the entire Luo family on a mere cyberattack.

"If that's the case, aren't you already invincible, with all these hacking-into-spacecrafts processes being like a stroll in the garden?" Mu's explanation sounded too easy for an infiltration so, Ye Chong asked skeptically.

"What you have stated is incorrect," Mu showed disapproval to Ye Chong's point. "Firstly, such hacking process is only possible under the circumstance that you are unnoticed by the foes. Secondly, one loses the ability to self-defend under the hacking mode, thus one could not react effectively if any form of casualties had occurred. Thirdly, if the foes too hold a group of mavericks, even if they were weak, such plan would fail unavoidably. Fourthly, if the foes had shut down the multi-channeled signal connecting system, such method would succeed at a possibility of 0%."

"Looks like this plan is very much limited by circumstances," Ye Chong showed understanding. "Still, mavericks are sure strong!" his tone was filled with admiration.

"Correct. The strength of mavericks is a kind of manifestation of wisdom. Comparing with sole physique or piloting skills, it is

much stronger. However, it is such a pity that you do not show keen interests in this field, or it would have been a very useful course for your future," agreed Mu.

"Ay..." Ye Chong nodded his head heavily and spoke on, "Whatever that is related to the processor is alien to me. You can keep them to yourself. Somehow it just so happened that I don't have talent in this thing. And I still have a lot more things to learn other than this. Sigh, the alchemy was quite interesting after getting the hang of it. But well, all was interrupted..."

"No matter what form of strength you would manifest, remember there always exists no limit to it. As long as the application is proper, theoretically speaking, any sort of problem always have one or more reasonable and correct solution to it!" concluded Mu.

"Right!" Ye Chong was inspired.

...

Inside the spacecraft, the experienced elderly sat on his throne in the main control room. The tray on his left was placed with a cup of steaming aromatic tea. He took a glance at the people running around as busily as bees with their chores in the room. He smiled, showing fond of such a contented life.

Capt. Hatik was an accomplished captain to spacecraft-voyages. It had been 35 years since his first sail as a captain. His face was torn by his age, his eyes glowed with one-of-a-kind steadiness that would imbue anyone with confidence upon seeing them.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

The communicator before him beeped out of sudden.

He frowned as he connected the transmission. An elderly appeared in the hologram. He appeared much in the pink of health despite his age, with his face reddish and lack of wrinkles. Apparently the elderly had worked hard to keep his skin young.

"Yes, Fred the Great sir, how may I help you?" the captain spoke respectfully.

"Captain Hatik, how far are we from Blue Ocean?" his expression was a little stiff but his voice was crystal clear.

"Yes sir, we are less than a day away from our destination. Estimated about a few more hours till we meet the patrolling team around the planet," replied Hatik.

"Oh." The elderly was serene as he spoke, "We are changing our plans. We are not going to Blue Ocean. Change the course to Morienste."

The captain was undoubtedly shocked, "Fred the Great, sir, b-but, the Blue Ocean is just before us. Why are we changing our course so suddenly? Sir, if you do not desire to linger at the Blue Ocean, we could at least resupply our ship there! With the current supply, we have to stop by somewhere to resupply on the way to Morienste. Also, would not this be a little bad for..."

"No. Don't have to!" Fred waved his hands forcefully, "Blue Ocean Planet has enforced the martial law. We are better off going somewhere else than being imprisoned there. Change the course now!"

"Martial law? What in the world has happened? That has made sir to change your mind at the eleventh hour?" Hatik was dumbfounded by his decision. Fred the Great was known for his capricious nature by the people, but Hatik saw him as a wise elderly. He believed that whatever Fred the Great did held a rationale behind.

"Yes... Umm...", Fred's face stiffened for a quick while then he looked calm. "I got the news just now. The Blue Ocean has been completely locked out, due to a possible outbreak of a virus namely Charles-V. I personally think that the change of course would be a better choice for us. Yes, I'll inform some of my old friends at Blue Ocean Academy, telling them to keep the wines away. For the

reporters, just leave them! They are used to this anyway!"

"Charles-V? The Black Charles?" Hatik's face was pale, "Oh my Fal Galaxy! How could such a terrible thing have an outbreak? Yes sir! You are right! We are changing the course as soon as possible!" His eyes were flooded with blatant fear towards Charles-V the virus.

"Charles-V?"

"What? Of all virus?"

"What do we do?"

"We have to change the course, move!"

Right when Capt. Hatik mentioned about the Charles-V virus, the main control room was boomed by the hushes of the panicked workers.

"Yes, truly, certainly, absolutely," Fred the Great became serious. "I think we are better off leaving this planet as far as possible. I believe that none of us would want to be infected by such a nuisance. It is quite fatal and horrifying after all. If that would happen, I guess the Blue Ocean planet would be in quite a mess, so it would be the worst timing to pay a visit."

"Truly, certainly, absolutely sir!" Hatik nodded his head repetitively, "You are right with what you said. We change the course now! We are ready!" and he turned back to his crewmen as he shouted, "Change the course! All aboard to Morienste!"

In the midst of the crewmen aligning the steers to a new world, at that darker corner behind where the light of Fred the Great's hologram camera did not capture, there stood a young man with a crippled mech!

# Chapter 99: Brent

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Mu might be concise at his words, but eventually the plan worked out without a hitch, which was unexpected to Ye Chong. Glaringly he and Mu flew into this very spacecraft namely the Sabre through one of the opened walkways. There was not any request of identity verification and nobody seemed to be alerted by these uninvited guests on deck, as if they were the official crewmen to this spacecraft.

And that was when Ye Chong was literally astounded! It felt like an illusion of seeing how Mu could blow up a hole on the body of this apparently unbeatable monster as if digging a hole on the dough. Oh the impact to his brain! Ye Chong was once confident with his "immense" strength but he lost them all ever since. He felt so small and insignificant the first time in his life, knowing the fact that regardless of how much robust he had grown, he would never be able to clutch the steering this effortlessly.

This was the first time Ye Chong felt defeated by the strength he possessed, which had looked so meager by then. However, the moment of depression did not last upon entering the spacecraft.

"Wow."

Thanks to the gigantic size of the spacecraft, the interior of the Sabre was certainly spacious. It did not have the cramped feelings of the usual spacecrafts expected by Ye Chong. The crafter of this epitome of premium vessels seemed to have put in ounces of efforts in providing the most cozy environment for anyone on board. The facilities were humanized by nature, they were thoughtfully designed and were user-friendly - an eye-opener to Ye Chong.

The floors were fully carpeted which felt fluffy and comfy stepping on. It helped Ye Chong a lot because the carpet would effectively reduce the sound of his steps.

While Ye Chong was anticipating a fight with the crewmen being the intruder himself, nobody was seemingly interested. It was strange that everyone hurried by his shoulders upon encounter and no one seemed to have noticed Ye Chong. Even if they did, it was merely because of the crippled yet beautifully-crafted mech behind him that they expressed peculiarity upon. Well "merely" their motive appeared as "merely" they looked. No one bothered to come for an inspection.

"Hey Mu..." Ye Chong was perplexed, "Aren't these men supposed to have some sense of alertness? Hello, I'm an intruder here."

"I had just obtained the information of this spacecraft. Apparently most crewmen on this cruise were employed by Fred extemporaneously, including the captain himself. They do not know among themselves, not even acquainted. Nobody else was intimate enough with Fred other than the nephew of Fred who has always been following his uncle, Brent. Mhm, Brent was also given the duty to ensure his uncle's safety. He seemed to be an expert in combats, probably the only obstacle you have to face at the moment," explained Mu.

"Brent?" muttered Ye Chong, which caused a middle-aged man passing by to take an extra glance upon hearing the name.

Ye Chong arrived before the door to Fred's room as directed by Mu, who had gained the information from the databank that both Fred and Brent seemed to be staying in this room. The interior and exterior were split into 2 rooms where Brent stayed in the exterior room while Fred was in the interior room instead. There were no guards by the doorstep, instead there were more than 20 cameras perfectly scattered around the door without a single blind spot. It looked like there was also an automatic security alarm system which would notify the guests inside in case of an approach of any intruder while projecting the imagery on the communicators or processor in the room.

An impeccable security it was, but not as impeccable as Mu!

These became child's play when Mu got into in the business, like the lord of a mystical world that controlled everything in relation to his expertise.

Ye Chong was more than jealous of course!

"Ready?" Mu asked Ye Chong.

Ye Chong took a few deep breaths before passing through the door. Feeling charged up, "Yes!" he signaled Mu.

Shush! The door opened and Ye Chong stormed into the room!

The opening of the door without forewarning was surprisingly to Brent at the exterior room, not to mention that shadow of a man in extreme-speed rushing into his lair, but he reacted in time.

A simple tap on the button to trigger the alarm using his left hand and a simple block with his right kept everything still. It was seamless, expressing the vast experience this guard held.

Clumsy he might had been yet Brent took that killing blow of Ye Chong without further ado. However, likewise to all the people Ye Chong had fought before, he underrated the strength of such blow as he was sent away to the back.

Chaining attack after successful capture; the habit of Ye Chong's skillful combats it was. As Brent lost his balance in the air, Ye Chong whipped his waist with his right leg. With that much of strength in Ye Chong, Brent would be crippled by this blow.

If it landed that is.

Brent twisted his body in mid-air and readjusted his position to have his arms crossed before his chest to take this incoming kick from Ye Chong, calm and still.

This was uncalled for to Ye Chong. The sensation of his kick was rather unusual for a man, it felt like a kick on the sides of a lubricated ball. He did not feel the expected impact, instead everything felt slippery and odd.



Brent slid over Ye Chong like a butterfly as he caught Ye Chong's feet and fluttered elegantly.

Ye Chong could not believe what he saw. His eyes did capture every move of this man but... Brent's arms were wiggling strangely as soon as Ye Chong landed his kick on them accidentally. Brent's escape was made possible because of his wiggly limbs.

This had ignited Ye Chong's vigilance as supposedly his assassination would have worked almost all the time and he was expecting a quick fight with this Brent guy, never knowing that he was the real deal. Although Ye Chong's face was indifferent as he usually was, his heart was already at the peak of waves of insecurity.

Ye Chong finally decided to take a serious inspection upon Brent. He was 180 centimeters tall, a bulky body and a masculine posture. He was handsome; especially his eyes, gentle like a breeze, comforting to people along with those dimples he made from time to time - a charmer to the ladies he was.

Of course, Ye Chong did not care if he was a charmer to ladies. The position of Brent's arms was odd enough to catch his full attention. The lower part of his body was of stoned stance, steadily firm ever since he landed while strangely his upper body was ... vibrating? His upper body was vibrating obscurely at a unique rhythm. His eyes remained gentle as they were even under a circumstance like this. He did not have the desire to murder - Ye Chong could not see him through, which only alarmed him more.

Coincidentally, he did not know the fact that Brent was inspecting him too. He did not seem sturdy yet his fist landed like a bomb. If I did not act careful enough, I would have my right arm fractured. What a glare he had - filled with blatant bloodthirstiness. Thought Brent as his heart grew colder, his face turned grim as he found out he was not facing a man, rather he was facing a dangerous beast that would feast on anyone upon sight.

"Who are you and why are you attacking me?" He might be in grave danger yet he acted in serenity. His tone was unshaken by Ye Chong's expression.

Too bad his unshaken will did not affect Ye Chong a bit. Ye Chong was finding the question unnecessary, wondering how a man in the middle of a dead-or-alive fight could still speak some nonsense. The man probably wanted to die he supposed. There was no reply from Ye Chong, he acted right away!

Ye Chong sneaked towards Brent, lurking in the dark, unseen like a column of smoke.

If Ye Chong exerted immense strength just now, then this was expression of his immense speed by then. Immense it was, fearsome it was, unrivaled it was!

Brent's expression turned somber. The last bit of his serenity had evaporated!

Within a blink of an eye, Ye Chong came to Brent's side as his hands transformed into overlapping afterimages clouding Brent.

Brent's expression which was somber had turned dismembered.

Thup! Thump! Wham! Bam! The sounds of them exchanging kicks and punches sounded like a tempest upon the window. Brent's hands were as fast as lightning too.

It lasted for 10 seconds before the intertwining shadows splat as both of them jumped away from each other.

Brent, panted as he bowed, his tussled wet hair stuck at his forehead, held his stomach with one hand, coughing uncontrollably. Streams of blood excreted from the corners of his mouth. He was in a really bad shape.

Ye Chong on the other hand seemed to be living and kicking, other than the frightening marks of palm imprinted on his wrist.

Ye Chong had won, judging by the situation.

He let off a sigh of relief. Obviously the opponent's hands were much slower than his, even though the opponent was still capable to take most of his hits while the fingers slid his wrist many times, trying to grab his moving hands. If he did not withdraw his hands in time, the fingers could have sliced through his veins. Ye Chong was surprised by the man's fingers acting like a metallic blade. At the very least his kick landed upon the opponent's squishy abdomen, that would take the kill!

However, frankly speaking, on the aspect of skillfulness, Ye Chong was miles away from the man despite having an overwhelming speed and strength upon the opponent, which was the saving grace to his victory. Ye Chong was still impressive though, the fact that Brent could block most of Ye Chong's attacks with his inferior speed while making occasional strike-back. Impressive he was, also dejected he was as he thought his speed was invincible, yet someone with a much lower speed could hold it.

His strikes do not hold any form of beauty. They were wild, primal and straightforward. Such an unintelligent tactic of fighting was utterly depicted on an inhumane beast like Ye Chong.

The scale of strength tilted towards Ye Chong as the foe was severely injured. He believed that it would only take another half a minute to take out this shocker before him.

Right when he was going for another sequence of hurricane dance - beep, shush - a voice came hurriedly, "Hold it!"

Ye Chong was alert the moment the door opened with a beep but he could not be distracted from delivering his final blow, especially when a trustworthy partner was taking his back for him. Only Mu could guard his back after all!

# Chapter 100: Fred

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Fred's appearance panicked Brent. Ye Chong showed ignorance to this elderly's debut however, as he raised his fist, "Wait a moment, Ye!" Mu stopped him with a scream. The rationale behind this pause from him was apparently to avoid further contradiction from brewing since they had already gotten full control of the situation.

Brent seemed very alarmed, as deep inside he feared his uncle being wounded by this beast.

Fred who had seen ample of dark sides of the world was pretty calm surprisingly, "I was not expecting you to take such trickery in response to my rejection upon your request. And I guess you used the same way to invite my old friend Zuo Moucheng over your place, didn't you?" Anger was embedded within his words while Brent's eyes were also coated with rage as he glared upon Ye Chong.

"I don't understand what the heck you are saying." Ye Chong was bewildered, his voice went somberly, "But you guys better be acting on my will."

"Hmph!" the elderly sneered. "Save the silly acting skills! We are already the fish in your net and this time the organization must be serving compliments to your plate I supposed. And at this rate someday you'll enjoy being one killer-whale bounded by the organization as you killed the insignificant others. You might be great, but you still are preposterous and pathetic!"

"My request..." Ignoring the elderly's words, Ye Chong spoke on, "Change the direction."

"Oh? Change the course you mean?" The mock on Fred's face intensified, "Very well then, to where we change the course, mister?"

"Uh!" Ye Chong did not see that question coming, "Um... Anywhere you want!"

"Anywhere... I want?" His eyes enlarged as he turned speechless while Brent's face went dazed as well. "Wait..." Fred reformed his understanding to the situation, "Mister, are not you from those men?"

"I seriously do not have any idea what you guys are saying!" Ye Chong was annoyed by how these men were acting so confusingly and why they could not just act on his orders already, "You seriously better be changing the course right now." He wondered if he should demonstrate his threatening tactic taught by Shang to make the men move.

"Alright, alright, alright. We are changing the course!" Fred looked joyful as he nodded his head, he stayed quiet for a moment as if pondering and then he enquired, "How about Morienste?"

"Morienste? Is it far from Blue Ocean planet?" asked Ye Chong.

"Very!" replied Fred.

"Good. Morienste it is," stated Ye Chong while both Fred and Brent looked at each other, sighing in relief. They appeared much relaxed by then.

"Is there anything going on in Blue Ocean?" Brent asked after staying silent for long enough, obviously liberated from his fear and fright as soon as he identified Ye Chong as not the "men" mentioned by his uncle. They were in much comfort as Fred even poured Ye Chong a glass of wine, of the colour amber and he gestured him to have a drink. Brent collapsed onto the sofa and started bandaging his wounds.

Ye Chong did not know what to answer to keep the ball rolling, he just mentioned whatever he had heard, "Oh... They said some kind of virus was discovered. Charl... Charles-II was it?"

"Charles-II?" Fred was wondering if the boy made a mistake, then

he realized something, "Charles-V? Charles-V you mean!" Fred's glass fell off from his hand as he was horrified, while Brent held his hands and watched in dismay. "Black Charles?" Fred began mumbling for quite sometime. After literally half a minute, he collected his thoughts as his shaking hands slid into his pocket for a communicator.

Brent was so startled by his uncle acting so gracelessly. In his impression of his uncle, he had always been an untroubled great man no matter what horrible things had happened despite being an odd-tempered elderly, which was a virtue he wanted to learn from his uncle.

Fred inhaled heavily as he tried calming down. He connected the communicator to Captain Hatik's room.

"Yes, Fred the Great sir, how may I help you?"

And that was what happened next chapters ago...

...

Since the course had been changed and the major dispute between both parties had been resolved. The atmosphere had turned much lighter. Other than that kick on Brent, there was nothing dissatisfying. Brent was not the kind who would mind a kick, while Ye Chong did not have any specific request in mind. Fred on the other hand was rather intrigued by the mech behind Ye Chong as he watched his nephew chatting with Ye Chong.

"My name is Brent. That's my uncle Fred. I wonder how should I address a fine man like you?" Introduced Brent with a gentle smile, trying to break the ice while Fred, his uncle was circling around Mu with his eyes lustered as he touched the body and mumbled occasionally, then he would ponder, strangely he acted upon the mech.

"Kun Ting," Ye Chong replied flatly as he came up with a random name. Well he was still pretty close to Blue Ocean planet, the place

of his plagued fate. He would not want to be recognized by someone right away.

"Great name. Great name. You have such amazing dexterity. Both your speed and strength are the best among the people I had fought before. There were a lot of well-known fighters who shared inferiority to your capability," complimented Brent sincerely.

"It was nothing," Ye Chong was not acting out of humbleness. It was simply because he had seen Mu in action before and he knew his skills were nothing in comparison.

Well, Brent took the line as a humble act though. He smiled briefly.

They grew friendly on each other so quickly that Ye Chong did not sense the urge to hijack the ship while Brent seemed to have forgotten the fact that he and his uncle were the hijacked.

The chatter mostly consisted of Brent's patient description on the world as he realized that somehow this young man who was only a few years younger than him knew nothing about the chaos and darkness in the world - untainted like a plain paper. Even though a kind man like him was agitated by Ye Chong's animal nature at times, he showed tolerance and love as he imagined the suffering this poor young man had gone through when he was a boy.

They dueled on fists and kicks as their afterimages overlapped each other, which twisted the airflow inside the room to and fro with the sounds of fighting resounded. Such kind of combat was experienced daily by both of them, with most of them being Ye Chong's victory during the first few days. However, Brent's tenacity grew stronger in a few days time as he lasted longer on Ye Chong's fists. The number of times he made a successful strike-back increased and those were some smart strike-backs too, which left Ye Chong clumsily reacting in place. On the other hand, Ye Chong attempted to copy Brent's fighting style. Though he

succeeded in mirroring his moves, something felt amiss within. Compared to the original, his moves felt different. Well that did not bother Ye Chong for long because he was not the kind to be stuck with such trivial detail. While most of his moves were learned from mutated lifeforms, he took a few useful ones for continuous practices. As time lapsed with much reference he made on moves, his attack turned acute and it became that Brent was tasting the bitter side of the fight instead! Brent the helpless man could only boggle his mind to figure out some tricks to turn the situation around at his best. Their skills improved dramatically as they trained on.

"Kun Ting..." Brent gently advised, "You might have exceptional speed and strength but your skills were too crude for a fighter. You would inevitably suffer if you met an expert."

Ye Chong understood Brent's words deep down, however he was powerless in this aspect as he lacked an appropriate teacher to this. Not even Mu could be his teacher, as long as Mu trained him, it never seemed to show significant refinement. Mu tried researching about it but said that he could not find a thing addressing to such issue in most of the major data banks and literally the whole virtual network.

The fighters were conservative regarding inheritance of skills. They had always been keeping it only to their apprentices that not anyone from the outside could receive them. Thus there was no way that these fighters would put their secret techniques online for education purposes. Even if one became the apprentice of these fighters, one might have absorbed a different aspect of the technique as one's teacher demonstrated.

Seeing how hard Ye Chong trained, Brent considered something in his mind. Since Kun Ting was willing to suffer tenaciously for what it took to be a great fighter and he turned out to be quite a simple person after days of interaction, he might be a good material to be trained. Kun Ting might have had some odd



behaviors but that was because he was not aware of the social norms. He was still as simple-minded as Brent would assume. If Kun Ting was given proper education and exposure to the society, he would change very soon for sure!

Yeah, if I get him to master, master would be more than joyous. And I would get a brother!

"Kun Ting, if I introduce you to a master, would you be willing to become his student?" asked Brent carefully.

"Mhm!" Ye Chong nodded right away. He was long in desire of Brent's refined combat techniques. It was just that Brent kept mentioning how the techniques would never be taught to an outsider; the norms that kept him out. Brent however did offer some tips he learned before to Kun Ting in exchange of classes being forbidden, which were still an eye-opener to Ye Chong. He was inspired and he wanted more. His desire to join Brent's group grew!

Meanwhile, Fred had never left Mu even when he was going for lunch. For his own safety, Mu acted like an ordinary mech as he stood there like a statue. Fred's intoxication frightened Ye Chong, "Kun Ting, just leave my uncle alone," Brent laughed as he spoke. "He always acts like this whenever he got into work. I had gotten used to it."

Brent redefined his uncle's impression in Ye Chong's mind as he provided him some information about his uncle.

Fred, also known as Fred the Great, was one of the few remaining mech-making master in the 5 major galaxies. Yes, as the title went, "master" defined his craftsmanship being the topmost. Being a mech-making master, not only he had to master the designing of the mech's main body, but he also had to master in designing everything from scratch. That included engines, armor, circuit, weaponries and other aspects in study. As limited as a man's intelligence and vitality, the knowledge in any study was vast and

boundless, it would be a miracle if a man could at least master one or two of them. Only geniuses, those with talents inborn while possessing strong curiosity to research and development could master multiple aspects of the study. While a master like Fred the Great, being the genius of the geniuses able to master every aspect relating to the mech-making expertise, he was one of the few, or even the one and only in the 5 major galaxies.

In this era where mechs were demanded and pilots existed everywhere, one could not imagine how much a mech-making master like Fred could have earned. It was more than just authority, wealth and social status.

Just like the spacecraft he throned upon, the Sabre of the Slan grade for instance was actually a gift from a very wealthy company after knowing his plan for galactic tour. Such an astronomical budget... that no folk would ever dare to even dream about.

"Oh... Beauty..." Fred, stared at Mu, mesmerized, "Oh? Oh!" He wiped his drool off as he did not notice he was drooling in desire. Ye Chong could not imagine that old man being a mech-making master as Brent claimed when he acted like a pedophile towards Mu...

Ever since Ye Chong had entered this room, he noticed that no one else would have ever stepped into this room. At most, the maid would send food to the doorstep on meal hours.

The room might be spacious but it felt suffocating to spend day and night inside.

Galactic tour was long and certainly there would be a moment of boredom for a mere man like Ye Chong. Not everyone could understand the romance behind it as much as Fred did. While counting the stars in the milky-way, Ye Chong was suddenly notified, "Ye! Something's going on in the ship!"

# Table of Contents

[Legend of the Supreme Soldier](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Acknowledgement](#)

[Chapter 1: Treasure and Trash](#)

[Chapter 2: Man and Machine](#)

[Chapter 3: In Good Company](#)

[Chapter 4: Brave New World](#)

[Chapter 5: Training Day](#)

[Chapter 6: The Wavy Leap](#)

[Chapter 7: Burn and Rest](#)

[Chapter 8: Rehabilitation](#)

[Chapter 9: Bucking Up](#)

[Chapter 10: Dummy Ends](#)

[Chapter 11: Against a God](#)

[Chapter 12: Onwards and Upwards](#)

[Chapter 13: A Kind of Peace](#)

[Chapter 14: Unravelling Secrets](#)

[Chapter 15: Mavericks](#)

[Chapter 16: Abyssal Rule](#)

[Chapter 17: That YC Guy](#)

[Chapter 18: Turn in Events](#)

[Chapter 19: Sudden Attack](#)

[Chapter 20: Aftermath](#)

[Chapter 21: Into the Woods](#)

[Chapter 22: A Chance Reunion](#)

[Chapter 23: Iron Will](#)

[Chapter 24: Lizard Slayer](#)

[Chapter 25: Into Darkness](#)

[Chapter 26: Unknown](#)

[Chapter 27: Unknown II](#)

[Chapter 28: Across Humanity](#)

[Chapter 29: Across Inhumanity](#)

[Chapter 30: Across Illogicality](#)

[Chapter 31: Questions](#)

[Chapter 32: New Friends](#)

[Chapter 33: The Merry Crew](#)  
[Chapter 34: Fearing the Unknown](#)  
[Chapter 35: There Be Pirates!](#)  
[Chapter 36: Stealth Rock](#)  
[Chapter 37: Camouflage](#)  
[Chapter 38: Red O' Beard](#)  
[Chapter 39: Knocking down the Stalk](#)  
[Chapter 40: That Willow Guy](#)  
[Chapter 41: At His Master's Service](#)  
[Chapter 42: Something for Everyone On Reno](#)  
[Chapter 43: Gold Wheat](#)  
[Chapter 44: No Rules At All](#)  
[Chapter 45: The Jinxed Man](#)  
[Chapter 46: Into the Black Cove](#)  
[Chapter 47: Masquerade](#)  
[Chapter 48: Through the Looking Glass](#)  
[Chapter 49: Through the Mask](#)  
[Chapter 50: Time Phase](#)  
[Chapter 51: Mu's Awakening](#)  
[Chapter 52: Out of this Predicament](#)  
[Chapter 53: On Board the Ship](#)  
[Chapter 54: The Callous Ye Chong](#)  
[Chapter 55: New to Blue Ocean](#)  
[Chapter 56: New Life](#)  
[Chapter 57: Inspector Fei](#)  
[Chapter 58: Urban Fiasco](#)  
[Chapter 59: I'm not an Outlaw!](#)  
[Chapter 60: Mech-anics](#)  
[Chapter 61: Mu's Predicament](#)  
[Chapter 62: Ye Chong Went Outdoors](#)  
[Chapter 63: An Unexpected Reunion](#)  
[Chapter 64: Ji Shangyan](#)  
[Chapter 65: Ye Chong's Philosophy](#)  
[Chapter 66: I Love Assassination](#)  
[Chapter 67: Black and White](#)  
[Chapter 68: Getting Away with Murder](#)  
[Chapter 69: Yang An's Invitation](#)  
[Chapter 70: Gliding Joy](#)  
[Chapter 71: Operation](#)

[Chapter 72: Into the Depths](#)  
[Chapter 73: Success](#)  
[Chapter 74: A Short Battle](#)  
[Chapter 75: Shang and the Do Kun Stone](#)  
[Chapter 76: The Alchemist](#)  
[Chapter 77: What's a Beauty?](#)  
[Chapter 78: Last One Standing](#)  
[Chapter 79: It's Showtime I](#)  
[Chapter 80: It's Showtime II](#)  
[Chapter 81: The Headmaster's Invitation](#)  
[Chapter 82: Triumphant](#)  
[Chapter 83: Suspicion](#)  
[Chapter 84: First Day in Class](#)  
[Chapter 85: Rui Bing](#)  
[Chapter 86: Ow That Hurt](#)  
[Chapter 87: Trial and Tribulation](#)  
[Chapter 88: The Troubled Chemist](#)  
[Chapter 89: What Happened](#)  
[Chapter 90: Deduction](#)  
[Chapter 91: Shang's Idea I](#)  
[Chapter 92: Shang's Idea II](#)  
[Chapter 93: The Lance in the Darkness](#)  
[Chapter 94: Instructor Hak](#)  
[Chapter 95: Confrontation](#)  
[Chapter 96: Survival](#)  
[Chapter 97: Blue Ocean Runaway](#)  
[Chapter 98: All Aboard!](#)  
[Chapter 99: Brent](#)  
[Chapter 100: Fred](#)